柳実冬貴

対魔導学園35試験小隊

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"

3.錬金術師二人

ファンタジア文庫

AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon" 対魔導学園 35 試験小隊

Volume – 3 - The Two Alchemists - Alchemists Scream

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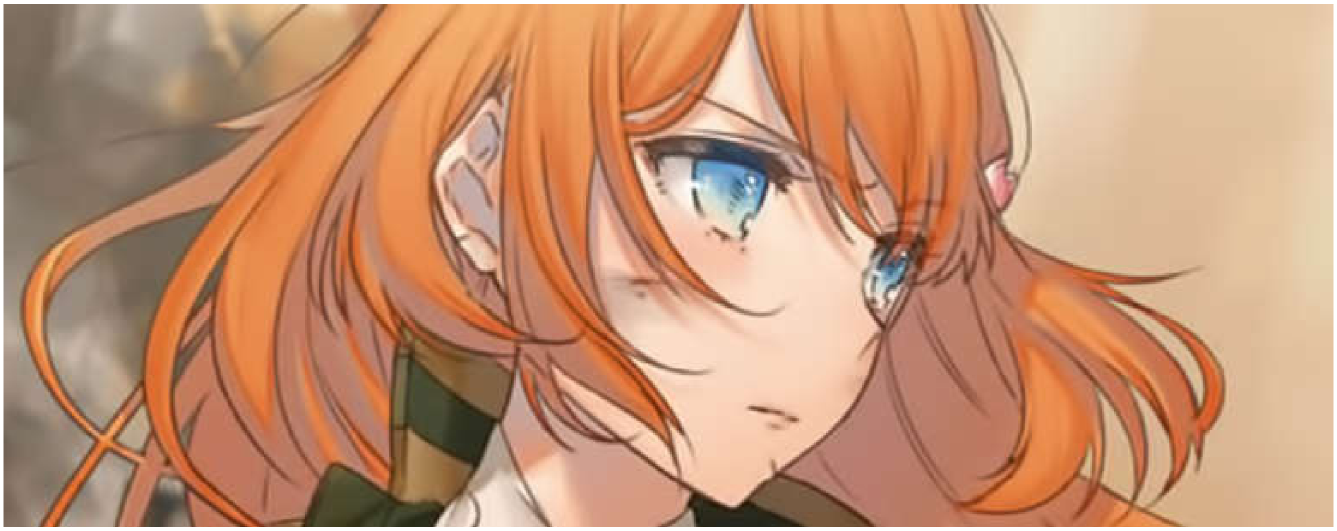
Credits



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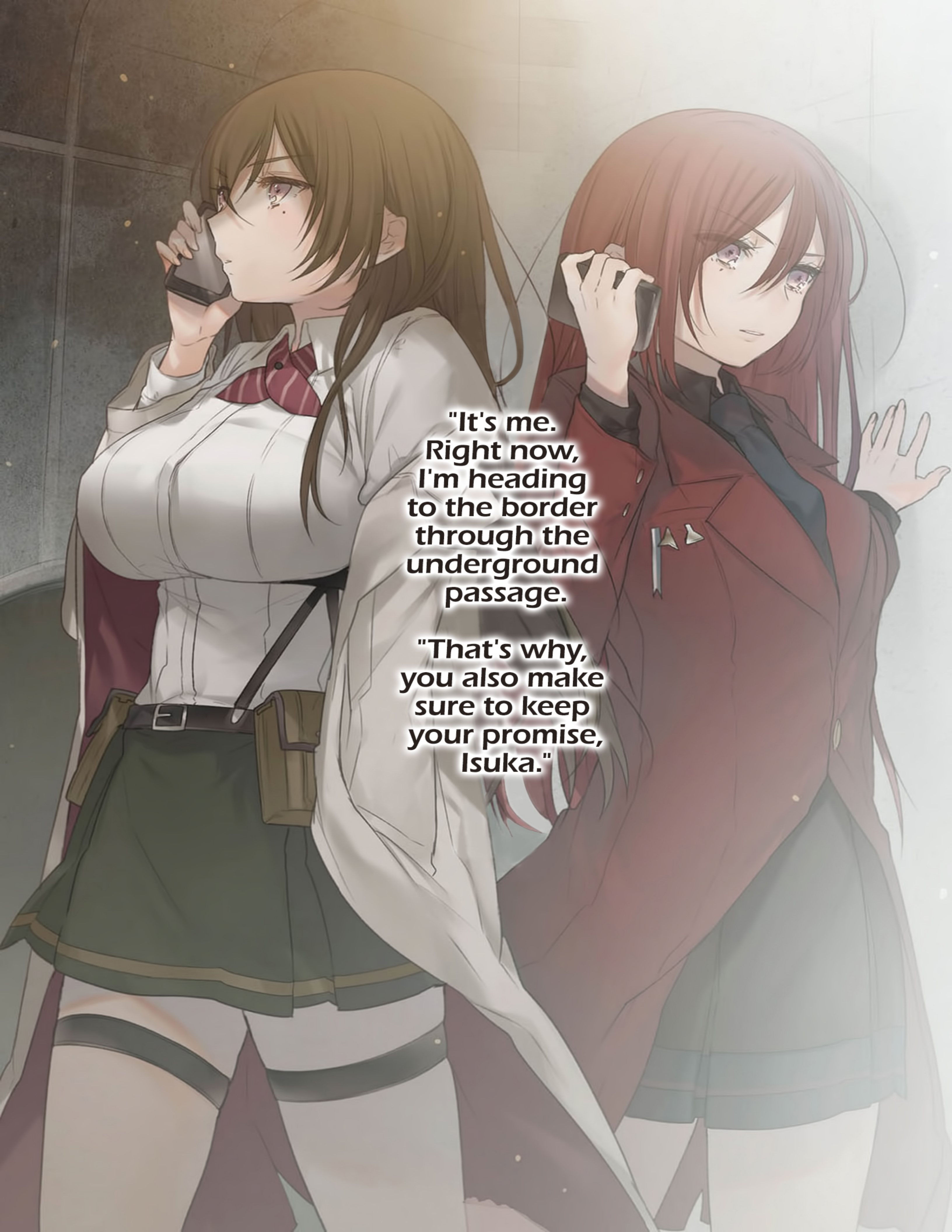
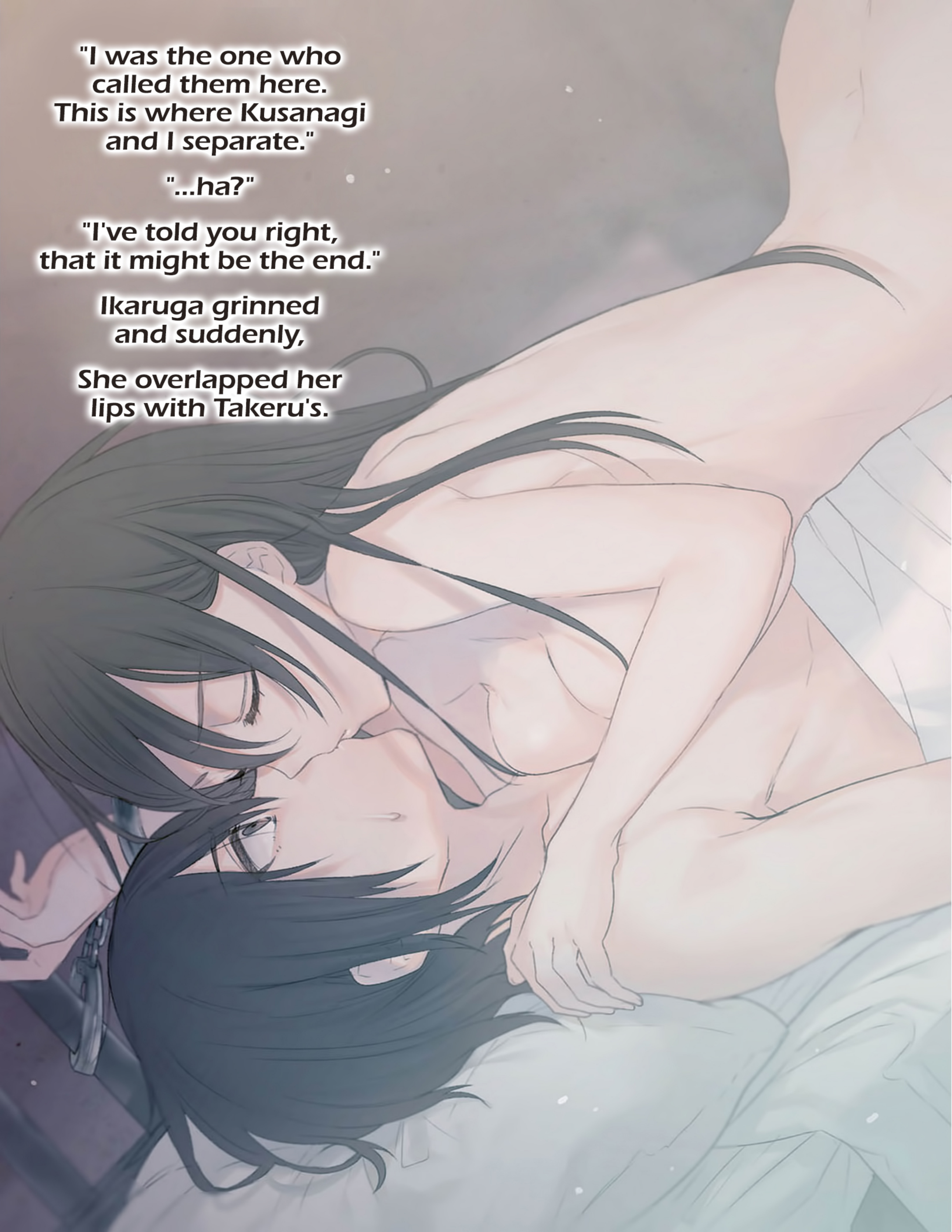
35試験小隊
3.錬金術師二人
AntiMagic Academy "The 35th Test Platoon"
3.Alchemists scream



"It's me. Right now, I'm heading to the border through the underground passage.

"That's why, you also make sure to keep your promise, Isuka."



"I was the one who called them here. This is where Kusanagi and I separate."

"...ha?"

"I've told you right, that it might be the end."

Ikaruga grinned and suddenly,

She overlapped her lips with Takeru's.

Prologue

A few days after the attack during the tournament.

"What do you want?"

After coming to Chairman's office Ikaruga asked Sougetsu with an expression that displayed fatigue.

Ikaruga was the only student who spoke that way to the Chairman. Sougetsu was accustomed to it, this time the situation was different and he didn't respond with laughter.

Sougetsu sat behind the desk quietly and cast Ikaruga a questioning glance.

What increased the tension even more, was presence of Kurogane Hayato on the side. He had no expression on his face, only his sharp eyes looked as if he was in front of an enemy.

An ordinary student would be standing upright after seeing that scene, but Ikaruga was different.

Not feeling a sense of urgency, her fingertips played with her hair and she had a relaxed look on her face.

"I'm sorry to call you all the way here. It might be abrupt, but as not to waste time, I'll ask you briefly."

"That'd be helpful."

"In short, I want you to answer briefly and above all, honestly."

"It already turned long."

"...the thing on this photo, are you familiar with it?"

Sougetsu slid two photos across the desk to Ikaruga.

Ikaruga picked them up while slightly narrowing her eyes.

In the photograph, there was chest of a Dragoon destroyed by some kind of cannon.

It was a part of it. Its original form was hard to determine, but Ikaruga thought its internal equipment, external part of the core unit.

"It's the wreckage of Dragoon that received magic interference from the Necromancer during the tournament a few days ago."

"I can see that."

"Although I think you know of it, but Inquisition's Dragoons are covered by armor made of anti-magical material like mithril or better, that is to prevent takeover by the enemy. If the internal instruments were interfered with, it would make it easy for a high ranking witch to take over the system."

"That's common sense isn't it."

"But there's evidence that the Dragoons used in the tournament already received magical interference beforehand. And it allowed Necromancer to take control of them remotely."

How the hell did that happen, Sougetsu added.

"The Hero who attacked the school, King Arthur was summoned into an artificial body, his soul was simply attached to a golem. That golem was really strange, for some reason Dragoon technology was employed in it. And the Magical Heritage... the Excalibur, didn't it strike you familiar?"

"It was basically a prototype of a railgun. Slightly improved, but it was almost the same. Anyone who reads magazines can tell that. Speaking of which, rather than being roundabout, why don't you say it briefly?"

Rather than saying it strongly, it was more likely she was really annoyed.

Although Sougetsu would normally respond with a joke, this time he narrowed his eyes while being serious.

"...you, do you know anything?"

In front of Chairman's inquisitive gaze, Ikaruga was already fed up.

"What do you mean?"

"You're a Suginami. Weren't you studying with Alchemist until you were eleven year's old?"

"..........."

"The Designs Children... Because you're one of them, I called you thinking you might know something."

"Designs Child", being told of that Ikaruga heaved a sigh.

It was said that the founder of Alchemist appeared several hundred years ago. It was the early days of Inquisition and the time of crackdown on witches was in full swing. Fearing being arrested Alchemist, experimented in secret. While the punishment was reserved for the witches, they aimed for a mix of science and magic, since it was relatively close to science, Inquisition and Alchemist began cooperating. That's how it was written down in history books.

Alchemist developed closer towards science and were a prominent part of the current industry

However, the problem was that the public view of them was still unchanged, they were criticized for inhumane research.

One of them, among the ones that weren't public was Design Baby.

In order to produce excellent researchers, they have been working on genetic engineering for a long time. Suginami's last name, rather than a family name it was for those that implied being part of, or engaged in special Alchemist research, it strongly implied being part of "Designs Children".

Ikaruga was one of those "Designs Children".

"Anything is fine. If you know anything I'd like you to tell me."

"Didn't I tell you everything? ...I provide you with all information I've got since Inquisition works as a shield for political reasons, doesn't it?"

Weighting the losses and gains in her mind... Ikaruga spat curses in her mind.

"It seems like I've an earache. But I, I feel like there's something important you still haven't told me."

Sougetsu who had a serious look on his face until now made his usual smile.

Unintentionally, Ikaruga almost clicked her tongue.

"What I know about... is pretty much nothing. Excuse me."

Saying that, she threw the photos on the desk, and attempted to turn on her heel.

That's when,

"——It's not over yet. Look at the photos of this handsome."

Sougetsu instructed her to check the photo he pointed at with a fingertip.

Completely fed up, Ikaruga turned her line of sight towards the photo on the desk.

"...what is this? It's all beat up, I don't really recognize it."

"Sorry about that. Because it's from the backup of Banshee's infiltration network taken in a hurry so image quality may be horrible. The person himself died while collecting it... but that's a meeting."

Sougetsu placed a hand on his chin, and while tilting his head slightly he stared intently at Ikaruga.

"——"Lost Matrix" You must've at least heard of it? The historically known Magical Heritages."

Ikaruga nodded slightly.

"Basically, it's a body part of mythological organism, the intact cells are held in special black anti-magical material which stops ageing and spreading of magic. But it cannot stop the flow of time, so it cannot maintain integrity of Lost Matrix for a long time."

"…………"

"It used to be favored by wealthy fanatics some time ago. It was a luxury goods of considerable value. But times change, modern technology has advanced… it became a top class hazard."

After moving his hand over the photo, he hit the Lost Matrix with a finger.

"This is a Lost Matrix of a Dark Elf. It was in Alchemist's fifth weapons development factory, stored in the level 6 research facility."

"Alchemist are a weapons manufacturing company. It's been like that for a long time, biotechnology isn't its specialty."

"Is that so? In that case, they're trying to make a weapon and use it. They are reviving the elves and intend to use them as weapons. This is clearly a violation of the law."

It was a ridiculous idea.

Fantastical organisms called elves were confirmed to be extinct after the Witch Hunt War 150 years ago.

The elves. Magical circles, chanting, they were able to use magic without them, it was as easy for them as breathing.

Even the large spells it took humans hours to activate, they were able to use them in just a moment. They were magical organisms probably considered as dangerous as dragons.

It was the same as Hero summoning, witches captured dark elves and subjected them to brainwashing in order to have them attack humanity, it was a very famous story.

In the end, the dark elves died out during the Witch Hunt War and the damage humanity sustained was also immeasurable.

Because of a single creature, New York, Indonesia, Paris, Hokkaido, the places called by those names completely disappeared.

Reviving such a monster was an extremely dangerous act.

"It was information Banshees paid for with their lives, the Alchemist experiments to restore elves are nearing success. Its just…"

"…………"

"...the cells remain in perfect condition, it doesn't seem like its their doing. Although they worked hard to collect them, they couldn't find any. Nothing, until four years ago. Lost Matrix in a pretty good state was taken out by someone, and there was a talk about the documentation on it being lost."

Sougetsu glanced at Ikaruga's face.

As if saying, "do you know anything?".

Ikaruga shook her head with a face saying she has given up.

"It's a ridiculous story. There was no successful example of restoring biological restoration of fantastical organism. It's impossible from scientific point of view. The Lost Matrix is dangerous because the amount of magic accumulated inside of it is enormous. I'm tired... my tongue's sore. It's enough, right?"

Saying that, Ikaruga left Chairman's room without permission.

Sougetsu and Hayato were left behind, after staying still for a moment they closed their eyes.

"Black, isn't it."

"Indeed. She still communicates with Alchemist without a doubt. That shield she prepared for Ouka during the tournament attack... that isn't something an Inquisitor can make."

"Alchemist monopolizes processing technology of blue crystal. Collecting such rare materials is impossible for students. In the first place, the students who use illegal materials or illegal modifications... I suggest to you to immediately capture them."

Hayato advised Sougetsu after looking at him.

Ignoring Hayato's advice, Sougetsu leaned on his chair and put his legs on the desk.

He placed his hands on the back of his distorted mouth and started to grin.

"Aah, no way, to find a traitor among my students. It makes me quite sad as the Chairman."

"...I apologize for my rudeness beforehand. Are you possibly having fun?"

"Eh?! That's not true. There's a traitor among the students I love? There's no way I'd be happy."

"I can't imagine you doing a double suicide, but we can't show any mercy. I propose we conduct a thorough investigation to clear the doubts."

"What do you think is the right thing to do?"

"We should arrest Suginami, interrogate her with the use of torture until she spits out information. Then use it as a negotiation material."

Sougetsu looked at Hayato and laughed mockingly at his words.

Hayato continued to look at Sougetsu just as he was before.

He wasn't stupid enough to believe he can get anything from observing Chairman.

Sougetsu dug out the relevance of Ikaruga and the matter of elves, it's been a good material to use as a threat to establish an agreement with Alchemist.

Because the matter of Valhalla has become the crucial, they should take hold of Alchemist's weakness and create a situation where they have to stick to their side.

...no.

Hayato frowned, assuming the worst case.

Possibly, Sougetsu won't hesitate to wage a war with Alchemists.

Crushing the Alchemist with a head-on assault, have the researchers move to their side and incorporate their technology.

Rather than maintaining the agreement, the real purpose was an invasion.

If it was this man, that wasn't impossible.

"That proposal, it's incredibly boring and ugly, isn't it."

Shaking his head, Sougetsu ignored Hayato's suggestion.

"This is where we let someone off isn't it? Suginami-kun has learned about the elf experiments, it should work soon enough."

"............"

"Put her under observation. Ask the best personnel possible."

Hayato examined what Sougetsu said about letting her off.

Obtaining threatening material, conducting a criminal investigation, or invading the Alchemists in the name of searching for dangerous materials, was it.

Proceeding to war with Alchemists, there was a possibility of this side losing, and the enemy was a company.

This side had only a few overwhelming advantages. However, even if the benefit from the war was huge, Hayato won't allow any sacrifice of ordinary people.

If he was really trying to start a war, Hayato's choice is to stop him.

"Yes. Then, I'll do it myse——"

"You're Dullahan's top, so mind your position. It'll become a pain otherwise."

"…………"

"Also, Suginami-kun has a promising future. Artificial genius or not, she's someone whom I really want to become a Regin. I have been rejected once, it might go better if I grasp a weakness this time. I want to be as gentle as possible."

"………… Then, I will arrange personnel from Banshee."

"Ah, and——"

Sougetsu pulled the chair, and made a shady smile while raising his index finger.

"Leave it to Kusanagi-kun and the others, if those kids are involved Suginami-kun might be willing to remain in Inquisition. Their bonds are somewhat strong."

"…………"

"It'll be like a spy movie y'know? A development where one of the deployed agents falls in love while infiltrating... I hope for something like that."

Hayato stared at the grinning Sougetsu.

Blankly, like the darkness itself. But Sougetsu didn't stop smiling.

Imagining something, Hayato slowly closed his eyes.

"You mean taking 35th platoon as a hostage to make sure Suginami stays with us."

"That's a horrible accusation."

"You're scum."

Accused of that, Sougetsu continued to smile like usual.

Even if hell breaks loose, this man's posture never changes.

"Weeell then, it's going to get busy."

Said Sougetsu happily while rubbing his hands.

After leaving the Chairman's room, Ikaruga walked down the corridor at brisk pace while facing down.

Restoration of Elves.

Ikaruga didn't expect that it would take this long for Inquisition to learn of such an outrageous action.

"Four years, that was short."

She grabbed herself while facing down.

Her bangs cast a shadow hiding her expression.

But her feet rapidly moved, that was clearly because of her interaction with Chairman.

It was herself, so she knew it well. So she stopped walking.

Exhaling deeply, her long hair hanging down, she looked up at the ceiling.

What came to her mind was, the thing she cultivated over the last four years.

The things called memories, Ikaruga shook them off.

"...I knew right from the beginning. There's nothing that can be done now."

When she said that after raising her face, it was already her usual self.

After changing into lab coat, she started to walk slowly.

"——Let's begin."

Ikaruga placed a hand in the center of her chest, and faced forward.

In order to begin the battle of "Suginamis".

The Glossary

Designs Child（デザイナーズチャイルド）- Written as（作られた天才）which means "Artificial Genius", or "Artificially-made Genius".

Lost Matrix（ロストマトリクス）- It's written written as（亜人結晶）meaning "Ajin's Crystallization". Ajin is mythical demi-human, google for more.

Chapter 1 - Traitor

"Ghhh...! ......!"

It was five o'clock in the morning, the sun had yet to fully rise. In the courtyard of the apartment over which fog hung.

A boy wearing a reddish-brown jersey was vigorously exercising with a tree branch in his hand.

He moved at a speed that could be called the limit of human's brain. The boy freely danced in the courtyard.

That boy, Kusanagi Takeru scattered sweat while chasing the shadow of an imaginary enemy.

The enemy were five people. The Hero whom he fought before, the King Arthur's movements were reproduced in his head."

Enemy's movement speed, speed of his attacks, pressure of his slashes, he avoided and repelled enemy's attacks.

He was made of flesh and blood. He couldn't allow his opponent to land a single blow on him.

Again and again, he endlessly returned the blows to the enemy.

Of course, he released the technique allowing him to control the brain limits, the Soumatou.

He had dropped the effect to minimum, but the exhaustion and load on the body was tremendous. It was a discipline he had repeated many times before but neglected ever since the beginning of high school. He resumed the training after confirming its necessity.

Repeating it ever since young age until middle school, he tried hard enough to cough blood.

But, it wasn't enough. It was nowhere near enough.

"———!!"

Swinging down the sword with his entire body's force, he made a crack on Hero's head. Intending to forge himself, Takeru's body was gradually motivated by anger.

His anger was bleeding from the edge of his sword, Hero's limbs disappeared because of his disturbed spirit, they were no longer there. However, another shadow appeared in front of him.

It was flickering, it held a small sword, it grinned, it laughed.

『"You're too shallow——!"』

It appeared abruptly, took everything from Mari. Took his comrade, Kyouya, and killed Yoshimizu, he was in front of him.

Something burst inside Takeru.

"AaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!"

He swung down with his sharpened sword, cutting him from above.

Straight, into the child of despair, into Haunted's brain——

"——Host."

Suddenly called, Takeru returned to normal.

Light returned to his pitch-black surroundings, a landscape covered with morning mist entered his vision.

And, standing beneath his blade, was Lapis who held a towel in her hand.

"...you started quite harshly haven't you?"

Lapis tilted her head like usual and asked blandly.

Takeru withdrew the wooden sword in a hurry and bowed.

"S-sorry, my bad. I didn't notice you. I didn't hit you... did I? Are you alright?"

"There's no problem. There's not a single wound in the spot flesh and blood Host has hit."

"No, that's not it. I'm really sorry."

He placed his hands on his head and bowed down again.

Lapis eyes as usual, didn't reveal what she was thinking. She narrowed her eyes slightly as Takeru pat her head.

He couldn't tell whether it felt good for her or not.

"Every day, what did you start doing early in the mornings?"

She asked as he took the towel from her.

He wanted to retort on the matter of being under constant observation, it seemed like she always looked at Takeru from somewhere. Every time she appeared suddenly, and suddenly disappeared. It could be described as phantom, she was there before he noticed.

Takeru has become accustomed to it, and recently he was no longer surprised by it.

"Ah... this is training. For the time being."

"Training?"

"Originally it wasn't supposed to be done every day, but I skipped it ever since entering high school. The burden from Soumatou is huge, if I don't move my body every day it might not respond as it should afterwards."

"I see. So that's a daily routine of an M?"

"............ No it's not?"

You must be mistaken, I'm not an M? Lapis told Takeru with a straight face.

"Even without such a thing, Host is strong enough."

"There's no such thing. Even before this fight, I've been just dragging my feet. Until now I just relied on your performance. I fell apart every time after releasing the witch hunter form, I need to become a stronger host."

With a wry smile, he took his hand off Lapis head.

Lapis silently stared at Takeru once again, she gently closed her eyes and placed her hand on her chest.

"I understand what is in Host's heart. The disorder in Host's sword is not the same as the one in his hand. Host is lying isn't he."

"T-there's no such thing?"

"No. I know it."

Saying that she knows everything, she made a step forward.

Takeru wiped sweat and awkwardly looked away.

He still didn't know much about Relic Eaters, but if signing a contract = sharing the same destiny, the possibility of transmitting their thoughts to each other couldn't be denied.

Maybe Lapis knew Takeru's every thought?

What's Takeru's nature, she might know that.

As he thought that anxious, Lapis suddenly put her hands in her pocket and took out something.

It was——anpan.

"Stop saying that. You must be hungry right."

....

Expressionlessly, self-confidently believing in it with all her heart, Lapis showed him thumbs up. While receiving the anpan from her, he dropped both his shoulders, and his theories.

"Hunger is the enemy."

"You really don't get it... and why did you get something so big."

He had no choice in his meal, cursing he opened the anpan bag and took a bite.

The thing about his stomach being empty was true.

"When stomach is filled, the depression also subsides, that's something I have learned from previous host."

"? By mood, what do you mean... no wait, why do you think I'm depressed——"

Just as Takeru was about to ask her, the door of the apartment was opened all together and rattled.

From inside, came a woman and a man who had a night shift with grumpy expressions.

"Shut up Kusanagi! You're being annoying ever since the morning started with your rattling and buzzing!!"

"I came back home at five o'clock in the morning and have to go to work at seven? Hey, do you want to die? Want to die? Hee?"

"Come on, the abnormal noise that's coming out of your room is enough, spare us that..."

"You're flirting with little girls first thing in the morning...!"

It was the dwellers of other apartments. Everyone had blood vessels visible on their temples. Takeru's neighbors weren't bad, but for some reason he seemed to be a bother to them.

He apologizes profusely time after time and went back to the apartment dyed in morning glow to make a tasteless breakfast for Lapis.

Two weeks after necromancer Haunted's assault on the tournament.

The tournament was postponed, it was to be held again once the colosseum is repaired. This incident followed the Hero raid, multiple coverage regulations have emerged immediately, and people were unsettled. Distrust has gradually spread in the world. Why did they need to regulate the media. Why does Inquisition hide an enemy attack. In minor news and net magazines, various speculations appeared.

The hypothesis that emerged the most was, the citizen's greatest fear,

Possibility of second Witch Hunt War breaking out.

Even though their numbers decreased, tens of thousands witches were hiding, lurking hiding themselves from Inquisition.

What if that uncertain threat, that clique decides to attack the human race.

The sorcerer that has attacked the tournament, the threat of a Hero, after multiple attacks they started to doubt Inquisition.

Fear started to gradually spread around the world.

Morning classes were over, when they entered the noon break, the corridor in front of student council room was suddenly crowded.

"Grrrrr...!"

The chance at acquiring points slipped away, **thud*, Saionji Usagi clenched her fist and twisted it after hitting.

Students around are all in harmony, and talking about the points for the platoon, the atmosphere was awkward.

The platoons that are determined to attain 200 points and to become second years have been already more or less determined, that is to say the 35th test platoon is...

Currently at 55 points.

By the way, the second 'get the point platoon' was at 110 points.

In the last place with a double score. It was easy to discern at glance just how bad was the small fry platoon's situation.

"Hey, there's still someone with double digit."

"Small Fry Platoon, they are still here, just like usual."

"No, no. I'm surprised they have that much points."

"That's thanks to Ootori Ouka."

"Compared to her, the rest of the bunch is..."

The students looked at one of the Small Fry Platoon members, Saionji Usagi at the same time.

But, after checking in what shape Usagi was, her ruffled hair and bright red face they looked away immediately.

Students went away scattering in various directions, Usagi stomped with increased intensity and raised an odd voice.

"I cannot stand it anymore! Our position might be bad but I can't stand being laughed for it! You guys are alive thanks to us!"

"Hey, you're too loud... it's confidential, confidential."

Takeru came out from the side of the classroom, and spoke to calm Usagi down.

Although Usagi glared at Takeru at first, but she was quickly discouraged.

"Ah, it's Kusanagi... good day to you."

"Good day to you as well. What's the condition of your left eye? Is it going to be healed soon?"

With that said, Usagi touched her left eye after being reminded about it.

On Usagi's left eye, an eye-patch was attached.

"If it was 20 years ago, I would've been blinded, but it seems like it's going to heal now."

"...does it hurt?"

"No, no. There's almost no pain, you don't have to worry about it."

Not to make him worry, Usagi smiled and laughed.

Even the 35th platoon wasn't intact. An injury said to be fatal for a sniper, an eye injury.

Although it couldn't have been helped, Takeru also felt responsible.

"...come on, could you stop making that kind of face. I've told you it will heal. I can even blink with it now."

"S-sorry."

"Rather than that, there are other things to be depressed about! Look, please look at this!"

bam* *bam, Usagi hit a place on the walls with their points on it, he looked towards the spot.

Takeru's expression changed and he started to blink.

"A stable increase... it's refreshing to see that in our platoon."

"Please don't go positive in a strange place now?!"

Despite Usagi's outrage, Takeru made a bitter smile.

Looking at it in another way, among the first years, the amount of platoons was running very low. Haunted's assault followed the Hero attack. The amount of people who left the school and the dead could no longer be ignored.

The 15th test platoon, although they still have points remaining, the only member that survived is Kyouya. The appearance of Yoshimizu Akira breaking down, and that of Kyouya's belly being pierced flashed through his mind, Takeru felt gloomy.

"My, my. Are you still in a slump? How dull. Is it because I wasn't here?"

He felt pressure on his left shoulder and looked that way, Nikaido Mari placed a hand on his shoulder and patted it.

"*Pfft*." She placed a hand on her mouth and laughed through it.

Seeing Mari's mockery Usagi puffed up her cheeks.

"You sure are carefree. Even though we're so desperate... what is it? Did you come to tease us?"

"Yup, I came to tease."

Mari said that with an incredible smile.

Usagi started stomping and screaming again.

"You piss me off! You really piss me off! You piss me off so much I can barely stand!"

pshoopshoo**, steam was rising up from Usagi's head and she loudly was breathing from through nose.

Mari had an ecstatic look just like Ikaruga, and her body shook.

"Usagi-chan is really cute. I want to tease her. I understand why Suginami wants to teases her so much."

"Mugyaaah!"

Mari acted just like an older sister, she put her hands on her knees and looked into Usagi's face.

"*ufufu*", she seemed to laugh elegantly.

"Then. How about in secret from the Chairman, this Onee-san will help you out? You know, I was living in the border so I have a lot of information〜"

"We don't need a small chest to lend her strength!"

"——Small chest has nothing to do with it does it!?"

Usagi counter-attacked, and both of them raised their voices this time! They were screaming like monkeys at each other.

This is the result when two characters that are easy to tease mess with each other, is what Takeru thought. He felt as if he was looking at two small animals trying to intimidate each other. He watched it for a minute, and he calmed down with that sight.

"Umm? Oh right, Mari. Don't you have a magic endurance experiment of a new material today?"

"Yeah, it's already over. I was told to go at full power, so I obliterated it with a blast."

Takeru's face turned slightly bluish.

"W-what kind of magic obliterates anti-magic material..."

"You know about my magic power, right? Something like that is easy."

She boasted and tensed her chest proudly, and she winked while fixing hat on her head.

What a dreadful girl, thought Takeru.

"Well, I probably overdid it a little〜. The Reginn bunch were all shocked."

"...you, are you by any chance having fun?"

"It's more fun than I thought. Unexpectedly, all of them are good people. The Reginns are quite amusing. As I destroy their newest weapons and armors they stubbornly create more and more to counter against me."

It's really funny, said Mari.

Seeing that Mari has a lot of fun like this, he felt a lot better.

She is now one of the students of AntiMagic Academy. Ever since that incident, although he proposed that she doesn't reveal herself as a witch, but Mari refused it.

Now she went to school with her identity of a genuine witch.

She mainly studies anti-magic science, and is involved in experiments. Although it was requested by the school, "I want to use magic to save people. I will do anything for that.", it became her hope.

Unfortunately, she wasn't authorized to take part in platoon activities, she couldn't get involved with Takeru and the others' activities, but whenever she had spare time she came over to play at their place.

At the standpoint of a witch, people around harshly glare at her, and the Small Fry Platoon members aside none of the students talks to her.

It was as if she was air, definitely she must have felt lonely.

"No matter what material they bring it's all useless. When I get my hands on it, even the Blue Crystal a certain someone was using would be easily destroyed～. Noo, if that woman is my enemy——"

She raised both of her hands saying "good grief" and sighed,

Suddenly her muffler was wound around her neck, and tightened after being pulled on both ends.

"Hohoo, so you're aiming at my life even during peaceful days like this, you damn vixen."

Behind Mari was a girl with sunset-colored, ruffled hair, the Calamity, it was Ootori Ouka.

"Hahyuu?! Ootori Ouka... release me right now, s-suffocating."

"Of course you are. It's called preemptive attack, kill before you're killed."

"Y-youuu, you insensitive woman who can't read the atmosphere...!"

"No, its just that this muffler is really good for choking."

"Hghyu!"

While still strangling Mari with the muffler Ouka tied it into a knot and looked at the board displaying points. She stared at the points the same way as Takeru did.

"Mmm. It's still no good..."

"Disgraceful..."

"Why does Kusanagi apologize?"

"During the Hero attack, I have refused the Chairman's fishy offer in rage... I should have at least asked for points..."

"Oh, that. If it was me I would have done the same. That man can't be trusted, in the first place the promotion is just a bait. We're students, we should steadily earn points——"

""You're one to talk.""

Said both Usagi and Mari.

"What is this woman, who skipped grades thanks to familial connections saying."

"Even though she preached me, acting all high and mighty. Something about me having special treatment〜, or something like that〜"

"I became a Dullahan because my ability and efforts were recognized! I didn't use any underhanded methods, they are false accusations!"

Yes yes, sure. The two of them looked at Ouka with contempt, and tears appeared in her eyes.

Takeru thought she was pitiful and decided to step in.

"Well, if she says that then it's fine. There was a lot of fuss recently we couldn't hold any platoon activities, I think that's pretty bad. We've been involved with a few things recently."

"I've decided to get involved on my own. The fact that we're not earning points is also partially because of me. To appeal to public, recently Dullahans are also performing investigations on C-rank magical heritages, it's going to get harder to get the points."

Ouka followed up to Takeru tearfully.

But after glancing at Takeru's complexion, she asked worried.

"...Kusanagi, is your body alright?"

"? Why? If it's my injuries, they've already healed."

"Not injuries. There is a sort of compensation when you use a Relic Eater. In the case of Vlad's its blood... what is it for Mistilteinn?"

Ouka asked causing Takeru to stand dumbfounded.

"I wasn't requested anything in particular... although it certainly consumes quite a bit of physical strength, there's nothing else."

"...is that so. But be careful. Relic Eaters are Magical Heritages. They're our enemies, never our comrades."

Just like usual, she demonstrated her magic allergy, being told that he thought he will ask Lapis directly. He looked around.

And he noticed.

"Eh? Suginami didn't come?"

Although Small Fry Platoon decided to come together during lunch breaks, this time Ikaruga was missing.

"Suginami didn't come today?"

Mari asked Usagi.

"Speaking of which, I haven't seen her ever since this morning."

Usagi thought for a moment and took out her mobile phone to contact her.

That's when,

"Kusanagi."

From the other side of the corridor a weak voice called him.

After he looked towards it, he saw Ikaruga in a white coat, chewing on a mint candy and playing with her hair.

"Y-you're late. What were you doing?"

Takeru asked, and Ikaruga,

"…………"

Stared expressionlessly at Takeru's face.

"…………"

"...Suginami? What is it?"

Seeing her poor reaction Takeru took a step closer to her.

It seems his worries were unnecessary.

Ikaruga narrowed her eyes and flashed a sexy smile.

"Are you curious? Do you want to know what I've been up to until now? Do you want to know everything about Ikaruga-oneesan?"

"No, I didn't mean that——"

"You pervert."

Unreasonable. It's the usual pattern.

Because he was always being teased, Takeru sometimes thought about taking revenge on her.

For Takeru, being teased wasn't that interesting.

"Well, it's probably something like sleeping on the roof anyway, right?"

"…………"

"Because you've been leading unhealthy life, you easily get sleepy. You should follow my example and move your body around a little."

Takeru preached with his index finger raised, Ikaruga stared in his face dumbfounded.

"............eh?"

Weird. Her reaction was worse than usual. She was more serious than usual, it was as if she was expecting something...

Just when he was about to ask her what's the matter seriously, Ikaruga laughed carefree.

"What was I doing... I'm fine with telling you, but are you prepared for it?"

She leered at him, and then glared at him with full force.

"...isn't your character kinda weird?"

"Weirder than you think——reality isn't that sweet."

"...why are you spouting words making it seem like an important scene?"

"Because you're good at carrying, because you're the only one prepared to carry my burden!"

"What are you talking about?!"

"Even if you declare that you will carry half of my burden, don't think I'll fall as easily as the two over there!"

bishin, Ikaruga pointed at Ouka and Mari.

Ouka's and Mari's faces turned red instantly.

"Ww-who, w-what do you mean by fall?! I-I don't get it but that sounds annoying!"

"A-are you an idiot? There's no such thing!"

Seeing them make excuses in a hurry, "ufufu", she made a nasty smile.

Ikaruga poked Takeru's belly.

"Yaa, how enviable, Mr. Lady-killer."

As she said that, Ikaruga looked at point board.

She looked at the Small Fry Platoon at the bottom, narrowed her eyes and laughed.

"...you guys never change, do you."

"Don't talk like it's someone else's problem. You're one of our members, have some sense of crisis."

Takeru said and grimaced, Ikaruga glanced at him, her hair swung.

Her look was strangely serious causing Takeru to flinch a bit.

"...w-what, you're kind of weird today aren't you? Do you have a fever?"

"Nnn, it's nothing."

She said it, turned at the board with points and laughed.

Takeru had a sense of discomfort, for a while now she seemed strange. He couldn't tell what was strange, it was very vague.

"It's just as Kusanagi said. you should work on something other than making him into a perverted weapon."

Usagi stood between them and drew closer to Ikaruga.

Ikaruga seemed weaker than usual.

"There's no helping it... fine then, I'll hack into Dullahan's database and pull up some dangerous cases."

"...i-it's really scary that you might actually do it."

"A big mountain is necessary right? Then we should aim at the largest one."

"We will turn into the ones being hunted! Also, why are you sparkling?!"

"Well then, let's start hacking... or rather, cracking immediately——"

"Please stooop!"

In order to stop Ikaruga who started operating a watch-type device, Usagi pounced at her.

Afterwards, it turned into the usual scene.

After finishing lunch, it was the usual platoon activities.

Today as well Small Fry Platoon was in a stalemate, as a last resort they decided to hear the information on Magical Heritage Mari had.

Mari was from the border, it seemed like she was gathering information after entering Valhalla, she seemed to be very familiar with the underground.

She seemed. Her stories.

"Umm, umm... a big mountain right? First... this, there were sightings of a giant serpent sleeping in an ancient sewer. Look, underground around here, it became a spider nest? There's Mossie here! Also, sightings around here end with——"

"...well then this. Red and green clay pipe came out of the sewers because of a plumber. About this, siblings ate too much mushrooms——"

"It has nothing to do with magic. It's a hoax."

"............then this? A silver haired boy with wings who saved many parallel worlds——"

"It's just some kind of pitiful cosplayer with a screw loose in his head! Everything you said is either a hoax or a misunderstanding, are you a shady UMA magazine?!"

"It can't be helped! Almost all the information I've had, I revealed it during the interrogation!"

The members exchanged the barren information while eating tea cakes in platoon room. Mari and Ouka seemed to be completely familiar with the atmosphere and feel at ease in the room.

"That's all information we have collected isn't it... other test platoons and professionals seized most of the cases in the city... as expected, we can only find some at the border."

Usagi proposed with a meek look, Mari cut in saying "Nononono".

"You should stop there. You're underestimating slums. In there, thirty seconds after leaving checkpoints you encounter bandits, you will be kidnapped and forced to work in a brothel."

"...y-you really did well to live in such a place."

"Because that way of life has been hammered into me from young age by the Chairman. So I know which places are safe, but its still dangerous. You guys are dressed too neatly and will be immediately recognizes as strangers. If you wear AntiMagic Academy's uniforms you will be surrounded in no time."

Hearing that, Usagi's face turned blue.

Horizontally from her, Ouka crossed her arms and made a deep nod.

"I don't recommend it either. Even officers of Inquisition inside the border proceed with great caution when investigating. The test platoons can earn points in border but they need to apply for a permit."

"Hee, did something happen there in the past?"

"It happens every year... going inside without any knowledge of it prior to that, stupid freshmen enter the border and get wiped out."

"What happens to them?"

"Nearly all of them go missing. No platoon was left intact."

Hearing Ouka's response, Mari said "See?" while looking at Usagi. "grrrrr", Usagi started to shake anxiously and **bam**, she hits the desk.

"Then what do we do?! There's not even five months until the promotion deadline?!"

Mari has laid out a dubious weekly magazine, Usagi posed and furrowed her eyebrows.

"That's why I said, let's go and look for Mossie!"

"Go do that by yourself."

"I-I'll tell you now, what if Mossie really exists? There's ten billion yen reward if you find it!"

"Are you a kid? If you're saying that seriously you should go to a hospital, I'll introduce you to a good Seelie."

"Don't talk like I'm crazy! There were sightings! Come on, look at this photo!"

Shocking, champion of underground sewers! Fantastical unidentified organism Mossie! Four hundred meters long!

…………

"Are you an idiot." "You're an idiot."

Said Ouka and Usagi in unison.

"What?! It might be a dragon!"

Mari protested with a tearful face.

"No matter what, it's too big to be real, that Mossie—"

"Only a fool like you can believe after being showed such a half-assedly made up picture. It says it's in a sewer, so why is there forest and mountains reflected in the background. Isn't that a fishing boat?"

"...ah, that's true."

""...haa.""

"Y-you guys didn't gather together to make a fool of me did you?!"

"Oh, you finally noticed?"

"Damn itt—!!"

Mari started stomping just like Usagi did.

Looking at it from outside, it would seem more like high school girls having fun in a family restaurant rather than the meeting of a test platoon.

Takeru who was in charge of preparing tea, placed a cup in front of everyone and made a forced smile.

He placed it in front of the three, and noticed that the fourth person isn't there.

When he looked around the platoon room, he noticed the last person sitting on a chair by the wall.

Takeru carried tea to the person by the wall.

"Are you not going to join?"

"...nn?! I'm not in the mood today."

Ikaruga took the cup of tea from him, set a leg on the chair and nestling comfortably she looked at platoon members. Without mingling, she watched them from a distance.

It wasn't really uncommon sight, it happened occasionally.

Ikaruga sometimes looked this way at her comrades. Even when there were only three members, she looked at the futile strategy meetings Takeru and Usagi held.

Takeru stood next to Ikaruga and sipped his tea while leaning back on the wall. Ikaruga also sipped her tea, and both of them made a bitter expression at the same time.

"...its horrible."

"You don't improve do you."

Ikaruga looked apologetically at Takeru who was about to cry and she giggled.

"Really, nothing changes... Kusanagi, Usagi, nor our Small Fry Platoon's state."

"No, something changed didn't it? It's become somewhat dangerous recently."

"That's not what I mean. I mean this silly feeling, the atmosphere."

With that said, aah〜, Takeru looked at Ouka and the others.

"Ouka came, Mari is staying over, I think it's become quite busy."

"But fundamentally nothing has changed. We haven't matured at all."

It sounded like an accusation, but Ikaruga's expression was relaxed.

They've known each other long, that's why he noticed. She didn't want it to change, that's what Ikaruga must've thought.

Takeru put on a bitter smile and thought about the past.

"Even if you say that, when there were only two of us and Usagi came, it was kind of awkward too."

"...nn〜?"

After Takeru said that, Ikaruga curled up and narrowed her eyes.

That gesture was strangely sexy.

"What about the time when it was just you and me?"

"Ha? Because it was just the two of us......ah."

"35th platoon started in the high school didn't it〜? I met Kusanagi in middle school."

The platoon, because their sense of camaraderie was strong before that, he felt like it was continuing from middle school.

Ikaruga tilted her head towards where Takeru was standing, it felt like she wanted to snuggle up to him.

"Is that how I am seen by Kusanagi?"

"I-I didn't mean it in a bad way. It's a misunderstanding because of our long relationship. At the beginning it was just me and you... for some time."

He got embarrassed a bit and averted his face.

Seeing that reaction, Ikaruga came closer and pressed her lustrous breasts against him.

"It sounded like something a married couple would talk about...?"

"Ha?!"

"Usagi would be our real daughter maybe? Nikaido our stepdaughter?"

"Why does it turn out like that..."

"Oh, but your legal wife would be Ootori, I would be the mistress... with an ex-wife feel to it?"

"Don't talk like we had a divorce! Ootori has nothing to do with it does she?!"

"Aah, it's a harem so Ootori aside everyone is a mistress."

"It just turned out that way because everyone aside from me is a woman right?! A-also about you and the others, I haven't looked at you that way even once."

"............"

"Really, is it really that fun to constantly tease me?"

Displeased, he folded his arms, closed his eyes and grimaced.

Even after saying the word 'tease' like usual nothing happened, because the silence continued, Takeru opened one eye and looked at Ikaruga.

Ikaruga was looking a bit lonely, gazing at her comrades.

"...really, unchanging."

Her expression, was one he never saw before.

Takeru couldn't utter a single word, he could only stare at her profile.

"Well then, it's about time. There's something I want to tell you guys."

It was evening. The futile platoon activities were nearing their end, as usual. Ikaruga suddenly raised her hips from the chair.

Everyone's line of sight gathered at Ikaruga.

"I will be taking a break from school for a while. See you."

She said such a thing.

"...hee? Why?"

Takeru raised his face and asked.

"I'm fine with telling you——if you're prepared for it."

"I already told you."

"...no, in fact I."

Ikaruga moved the hands from her waist and joined them in front of her large breasts, giving them a meek look.

"——There's a Dragoon race being held tomorrow, Gaia is whispering to me."

"............"

"I know the risks. The Dragoon's race is a dangerous game, sometimes the audience is involved in accidents. Still, I can't suppress it, my heart is throbbing——"

"Isn't that just cutting classes!"

Takeru couldn't stop himself from retorting.

He tried to land a karate chop on her, but she distanced herself from him slightly.

"That's how it is, so continue the platoon activities without me."

"Hey, as captain I can't recognize such a reason!"

"Well then, you guys, do it properly when Ikaruga-oneesan isn't here〜"

She went pass Takeru with a lab coat on, and walked away with loud footsteps.

Of course, Takeru tried to chase and stop her.

But, Ikaruga stopped halfway as she was opening the door and unexpectedly turned her face around.

"Stay healthy, bye bye."

Bye bye.

As she waved to them, he stopped his feet.

Ouka and Mari had a questioning look on their faces, it seemed outrageous.

"Seriously, what was that. I, it seems like I don't know Suginami that well yet."

"Yeah... I thought we get along well, but it seems like Suginami puts up a wall between us. I wonder if its because she's from another field, a technician... Kusanagi, why didn't you stop Suginami? As captain, you should whack her."

The familiar preaching voice of Ouka didn't reach Takeru.

Something, a strange uneasiness lodged itself deep inside him.

It was several minutes after Ikaruga left platoon room.

"? What is it, Takeru? You've been silent and have had a difficult expression for a while now."

"Kusanagi, you're the captain so give us a proper briefing. We will really have to repeat a year at this rate."

Hearing the voices of the two, Takeru looked up reminded of them.

"Sorry, sorry. What did you say?"

"...are you really all right? What are you spacing out for?"

Mari leaned over and stared at his face.

"...I'm a little uneasy, I think Suginami was acting pretty weird."

"? She seemed the same as usual to me."

Ouka tilted her neck while crossing her arms.

Takeru recalled it while staring at the ceiling, and scratched his cheek.

"I don't really get it but, it seemed really peculiar when I spoke with her? It was a little weird. Or rather, the tension was pretty unstable."

Hearing what Takeru said, Mari and Ouka didn't really get it and just tilted their necks.

"Also she... whenever she's going, she usually says 'see you' or "see ya later', or something like that."

"? So what?"

"And today she, she said 'bye bye' right? It's the first time, for her to say goodbye properly."

"...isn't that normal? You're brooding over something like that?"

Even though Mari said that, Takeru still felt uncomfortable.

Takeru didn't have a rational basis for it, but it's been four year ever since he first met Ikaruga.

It was something he could sense because of their long relationship.

And Takeru wasn't the only one who felt that.

"Certainly, it was strange."

Usagi seemed to think the same as Takeru, she was silent up until now.

"Because she——didn't grope my chest even once today."

""............""

She said it with a straight face, Mari and Ouka showed a troubled reaction.

"............i-isn't that good for you, that she stopped."

"It isn't about whether it's good or bad. At times like this Suginami is plotting something."

Usagi said that, put a hand on the desk and leaned over.

Takeru nodded strongly, agreeing with Usagi.

"Indeed. It was definitely strange."

"Yeah, there's definitely something."

The two veterans agreed.

Mari and Ouka had no idea, neither of them could pinpoint it.

"I wonder if its because you know each other for a long time. Because you've been fooling around together for a long time, you notice something we can't tell."

"N-no no, now that I think about it, I also think it was a bit strange? Yup, yup."

"...why are you changing your opinion. Don't try to mingle with them! Don't leave me alone!"

"B-because you can't read the atmosphere. I'm one of those who can do that!"

"It's not about being able to read the atmosphere!"

Is that so?! Ouka had a shocked expression on her face. He wondered if the two of them really got along badly, and he started to think about Ikaruga.

It might have been like Mari said, the four year long relationship between them might have made a subtle difference. Ikaruga is someone who could be called Takeru's first friend. He didn't have many people he knew from childhood. He had extremely bad relations with other people ever since he was young, even after coming to city he was isolated because he was always carrying a sword.

Under such circumstances, the only one who spoke to him was Ikaruga.

『"You're really interesting. I like you. I like sharp people."』

After telling him that, Ikaruga started to involve herself with Takeru. What led Takeru to how he was now was Ouka, but the one who taught him common sense was Ikaruga.

To learn common sense from the most insane person in the platoon might sound strange, but Takeru had been causing problems for other students, and if not for Ikaruga, he would have been expelled.

Although Takeru wasn't aware of it, but looking at it from the side, Ikaruga was like an older sister to him. It was the same for Usagi as well.

"............it'll be fine if it doesn't become strange."

As Takeru worried about her, suddenly, someone knocked on the platoon's door.

Usagi who was eating biscuits reacted quickly, stood up and trotted towards the door.

"Fueh?"

And when she opened the door.

"Eh?"

"Usagi? What is it?"

"............certainly, someone knocked on the door, right? I can't see anyone."

Usagi made a questioning look.

Takeru also headed towards the door, and asked in the hallway.

Certainly, there was no one there. He heard voices from other platoons, but he couldn't see anyone.

"What is it? A prank?"

"I don't think there's anyone in school who would think of doing that, and... eh?"

When Takeru tried to close the door, he heard a weird sound coming from below.

After he looked down, he saw an envelope being put there.

He picked it up and looked at the address, 'To Kusanagi Takeru-sama', that's all that was written.

"A... letter?"

He was concerned with, but he didn't know anyone who would leave him a letter.

"What what...? A love letter—?!"

"L-love letter you say...?!"

"Even so it's quite simple... a brown envelope."

Mari and Ouka came over towards the door, and the entrance turned noisy.

"No, no matter how you look at it, there's no way it's a love letter..."

While saying that, he opened the envelope carefully and took out the letter from inside.

The contents inside were simple, a folded piece of B5 paper. All platoon members looked at the content of the letter.

They were really a bunch with no delicacy.

Unworried, he looked at the letter.

In there it said,

Suginami Ikaruga has betrayed the academy.

Just that, it was written briefly.

Chapter 2 - Border

Alchemist's fifth weapons development laboratory located in the border.

The official reason to build it in modern slums was to mine anti-magic materials by the border, it was more efficient that way because there was no need to transport them.

However, the truth was that in the border, no anti-magic material was mined. Although there was a mine, but it wasn't functioning ever since it was built.

The real purpose, was to reduce interference from Inquisition as much as possible.

The border was an area with lots of crimes happening in it; even the Inquisition had a hard time with it and can't really control it. Both mafia and small groups of witch communities have been established inside of it.

At the entrance of the border there is a checkpoint, ordinary people require a permit to enter it.

It was the best place to hide something from Inquisition.

Fifth weapons development laboratory, in fact it was too big to be called a laboratory.

It wasn't as big as the headquarters, but it was about size of a theme park.

The sections inside were divided into levels, the deeper the level was, the more dangerous was the research performed inside.

It was a mechanism of gradually increasing the security.

The sections are divided into 5 levels, the levels signify how dangerous the weapons researched are, with level 5 being where weapons of mass destruction are being researched

Only a few people among the alchemists know about the existence of level 5.

It is located inside of a tower in the deepest part of the facility.

On the top floor of it, there was a space with pure white walls.

That, was a level 6 section that officially didn't exist.

The white walls covering the interior were emitting dim light. It was a first-class anti-magic material, the Weiss Crystal. No magic could pass through the walls coated with rare material.

In the center of that space, there was a single pillar, an incubator filled with dark red liquid.

Right beside, there was a girl who looked up at the incubator.

She had unkept red hair; it looked as if she cried recently. Although she was wearing a lab coat like a scientist but the color of the coat was deep red.

That outfit stood out from the white lab coats. Between Alchemists, it implied a different rank from the white coats with the colored coat meaning she was one of "Designs Children", a "Suginami".

She had a somewhat sleepy look, like a tremendous enclosing darkness, with a sense of emptiness that seemed completely removed from human beings.

"——A sorrowful face of a scientist, that's pretty rare. I'm really curious if people who carry the name of "Suginami" normally feel emotions."

From behind the woman, a man in a black costume contrasting with the white facility.

He had sparkly blond hair and priestly clothing matching his disgusting smile.

It was Valhalla's executive, necromancer Haunted.

After hearing his speech, the woman turned her face towards him with a relaxed movement.

"...Sorrow? What's that."

"Sorrow is sorrow y'know. It's a really captivating feeling. It's a great emotion that makes women more beautiful. It's really wonderful."

"I don't understand such things."

"It's like watching a girl being left behind after being soiled. It makes you want to hug her. Strong enough to break her."

"You want to hug me?"

Hearing such a frank response, Haunted was suddenly left speechless.

The girl even opened her arms and said, "come come", welcoming Haunted.

"I don't really mind. I can understand the sexual meaning."

"............"

"I have no experience, so I'll leave it all to you. I need to learn."

She said such a thing while being completely expressionless, Haunted suddenly gulped and dropped his shoulders

"...no, it's fine. I have completely withered. Also, I didn't really mean it in a sexual way."

"Do I have no sexual charm? Suginami's proportions should be perfect. Or are you a pedophile?"

"No. It's because you are a boring person. Teasing people like you goes against my sense of aesthetics, no offense."

Their eyes met, and Haunted slowly came closer to the girl.

"Are all Suginamis like this? I want to complain from the bottom of my heart about your lack of feelings. Isuka-san, why don't you live your life more like a human? Though, it's my hobby to destroy such happy lives."

Haunted said to the girl called Isuka.

"The only thing that interests us is research."

She responded flatly, and stared at Haunted.

"What happened. You look pretty horrible."

"Oh, you mean this? Ufufu, it's pretty good, right? It's kind of like a medal."

He said that and **pan* *pan**, he hit his addition lightly.

His clothing was brand new, but Haunted had his body all wrapped in bandages.

From between beaten-up bandages something like ash spilled, his internals were clearly burnt.

"Even though I changed majority of my body, the magical attribute of aurora is really dreadful. The damage to the soul also affects the physical body, and it turns out all beaten up like this. Even my Nacht is in bad mood after our first defeat and won't come out of the sheath."

"Oh, the attack on the tournament last month. I'm interested in what did you in."

"Ufufu, it's been a while. Those children are wonderful. That's why I'm not telling you. You won't be able to stop yourself from wanting to dissect them."

"That was my intention."

"Right? That's why I won't tell you. They're my treasure."

Haunted made a big grin.

Even that smile didn't catch Isuka's interest and she continued to stare at the incubator.

"How is it? Did the restoration of an elf succeed?"

"No. It's a failure. It grows while its still an embryo, but after that it rots and disintegrates. Substituting with human cells doesn't seem to work."

"Did you try fertilizing a witch's egg with a elven nucleus?"

"Humans and elves are completely different races. Even if it succeeded, it would become a half. It's not beautiful at all. A half is no good."

"We don't mind if it's a half you know?"

Said Haunted, Isuka shook her head in response.

"I don't want to make any more failures. What I want to make is a perfect Dark Elf."

"...there's one thing I want to ask, why do you insist on recreating a dark elf?"

"..........."

"I feel something like a hatred directed towards me."

The expressionless Isuka normally didn't feel hatred.

Being told that, she looked at Haunted with her black pupils.

"...hatred?"

"Yeah. Because I'm interested in feelings of others, I can tell."

Haunted opened his eyes slightly and laughed.

He focused on the beauty of human emotions, he cherished the wonderful passions, loved them, and breaking them was his utmost joy.

Haunted probed Isuka's emotions.

Emotionless humans don't exist, that was his theory.

No matter how emotionless they seem, there's always something hidden.

He tried to force something out from Isuka.

Without a doubt, it has to be something wonderful.

There's definitely something, there's a passion dwelling inside this frigid woman——

"I won't be able to meet your expectations, there is no such thing."

Isuka denied his observations, and stared at his approaching face.

She put her hand on his cheek and made a distorted smile by using her face muscles.

"I have told you already, we Suginami are only interested in research and development. We were created just for that purpose. To make better, irregular weapons, we're not interested in anything that doesn't lead us to creating stronger weapons. It's just a result of how we have been made, that is all. The only emotion that exists within Suginamis, is the one that drives us to achieve results.

"...Suginami's motto, is it. Then why did you betray Alchemist, and decide to side together with Valhalla? Alchemist has the best possible facilities. You can do whatever you want and you don't need to worry about money and personnel in there."

"In the end, Alchemist is a company. Like I can only make things that were requested. What meaning is there if I can't make things I want to make?"

Definitely, deep inside the dark pupils greed could be seen.

Scientists are also human. They don't have any unprecedented feats, there is a lot of people who aim high, but they're always held back by "Ethics".

Great scientists from the past also thought about things like toxicity, hazards, harmful effects or utility as they advanced their research. Those who suspected danger made the tough decision to discontinue the research and there were many scientists who gave in to despair seeing their research being utilized as weapons.

However, if you were to get rid of the ethics, if there were human beings that only researched.

If you were to mass produce geniuses that don't hesitate to step into taboo territory.

Mankind would be able to move forward.

That was the reason for starting the "Designs Child" program.

"Then, the fact that you ordered me to kill every researcher in here, came from a rational decision rather than a grudge and desire?"

"Of course. In the end, they're just researchers. There is a clear distinction between them and the Suginamis. For us who have no unnecessary emotions, there is no laziness nor fatigue. That is why their performance and utility is inferior to us. That's why I wanted you to kill them, they have no more use."

"............"

Hearing Isuka say that, Haunted closed his black eyes.

"Right now they are great. They are puppets, but their utilization rate went up. They move as instructed, you have really done well. Thanks to you the experiment will succeed faster."

She placed a hand on his shoulder and told him her thanks.

But Haunted's eyes were stained with red, and he hit her hand, pushing it to the side

"——You, do you think nothing of human lives?!"

Forcefully shaking her hand off, Haunted shouted with visible irritation.

His appearance was as if he were a real priest getting angry about someone's lack of morals.

Isuka rubbed her hands while tilting her head.

"...I don't really get it, but do you really mean that?"

"Yeah I do! I really do! Certainly, I do kill people, I trample over their precious lives! But unlike you, I don't kill people just because there is a reason to!"

He heated up and said it with a strong emphasis, almost like a priest.

"I kill people because I want to kill! I don't have objective in it, I just like killing people! I love people! I really love them! And more than anything, I love the passion they show when they're on verge of death! That's why I kill!"

"Wait, why are you angry?"

"I'm telling you should feel something when you kill people! Murdering people because of an objective is just a blasphemy, it's being rude to the dead! Hatred is fine, love is fine, even a burst of anger is fine! If you're killing... please feel something... if not, the killed people are... more than anything, they're pitiful..."

Haunted preached with tears on his beaten up face.

She didn't know if it was because he was insane, she didn't know much about sanity.

However, it probably were his true feelings. The normal humans get frightened after all.

But, Isuka was different.

In response to Haunted, Isuka circled around him.

"I don't really get it but——the one who killed them wasn't me, it was you right?"

Haunted as expected, opened his mouth wide dumbfounded. That wasn't what he meant, is what he wanted to say.

But Isuka tilted her neck, still expressionless. She placed a hand on her chin and tried to understand. Haunted, hearing that manner of speech, he decided there's no hope there.

With a cold expression, Haunted wiped off his tears using a sleeve and looked into her eyes.

"...I was an idiot to try to teach you something about morality. I hate you, it seems like scientists and sorcerers are incompatible."

"I see. A pity. But you guys are necessary to me, and you guys need me as well, right?"

Being asked, Haunted spat out a sigh.

Isuka continued unworried.

"I keep my promises. With the Suginami name on the line, I will definitely restore the elves."

With Isuka's declaration, Haunted recovered his original mental state.

"So do we. If you succeed with restoration of the elves, and present us weapons, we will welcome you into Valhalla. With the Magical Dragoons you're developing that will allow us to use pseudo-Hero Summoning it will be enough of a gift to higher-ups. That is if the experiment really succeeds."

"Don't worry. The experiment is almost complete."

"I've heard that one of the Lost Matrixes was stolen by someone a few years ago?"

"Why do you know that?"

Isuka inquired still expressionless, Haunted smiled in response.

"Just overheard it somewhere. But it really is amazing, for a thief to steal the crystal from such a fortress-like laboratory, it must've been a outrageously good thief."

As Haunted said that, Isuka's eye reflexively convulsed for a moment and she put a hand on her forehead. Although it wasn't much, sweat appeared on her temples.

"A migraine or something? I have a good medicine."

"...no, it's alright. It's nothing."

She closed her eyes and removed her hand from forehead.

"If you want, I can help you with recapturing it."

"There's no need for that. Earlier, information on the Lost Matrix was leaked."

"...ohh, is that information trustworthy?"

"There's no trust or anything. It's a leak from the person who stole it."

"From the person who stole it, why is that... can it be, someone you know?"

Haunted asked curious, and Isuka averted her face in a different direction

"...yeah, from my former compatriot."

She slightly narrowed her eyes and put her hand on her forehead again.

Five minutes later, Haunted left the level 6 section and headed down by elevator.

"...from the person who stole it... was it. It sounds a bit fishy."

He placed his hand on his chin while still in elevator, and his shoulders shook with laughter.

The high-speed elevator reached the ground in a blink of an eye, the door opened together with a high pitched sound.

That moment... he felt a nasty acrid odor overflow.

It was a smell that reminded of rotten corpses.

"It's a good scent, but it's about time it hit the limit. It seems like maintaining it with just magic isn't enough."

Haunted filled his lungs with the putrid smell, and headed outside of the tower with loud footsteps.

As he headed there, he passed by several researchers.

"Yahoo, everyone, working hard without sleep or rest!"

He passed by them while cheerfully greeting them and flashing smiles.

"Helping out a black company and a black boss is really hard, isn't it... I wouldn't be surprised if there were suicides. But don't worry, the work is almost done! Just work enthusiastically for a while longer!"

That figure, it looked like a doll.

Haunted headed towards the lady in the reception at the lobby, he threw an authentication card over as if he was playing cards. The card got stuck to receptionist's forehead.

"Ss-so-sorr-rry f-fo-r t-the wa-it."

The receptionist with the rotten left eye smiled eerily, and nodded while making a disgusting sound.

——Haunted used this place as his stronghold ever since he was sent to this city.

He summoned and piloted the Hero sent to rescue the VIPs from this place.

He was to bring back the results of the successful restoration of elves to Valhalla. Until then, he was to listen to Suginami Isuka's instructions.

Isuka ordered him to kill everyone.

That's why he killed them. He killed them with joy. He killed them until he exhausted his love.

Everyone living in this place, all the researchers aside from Isuka.

People who were working in this place, guards and mercenaries from private companies aside, were corpses

The corpses were implanted with an order to "single-mindedly engage in experiment", so they were perfectly obedient.

All of it was possible because the border was a place that made Inquisition's interference difficult.

Beyond the automatic door, as Haunted left the tower, he gracefully opened his arms wide on the stairs right in front of the lobby.

"It burns and aches. Is it an omen that something is about to happen?"

While saying that, he scratched his own burnt skin.

"Aah... it's just like it was back then, I want to plunge into an irresistibly sweet battle."

As if he was desperately in love, he stared at the sky and shuddered.

* * *

After receiving the suspicious letter, Takeru went to the dormitory to talk with her about it but after she came out with a meek look, everyone hid themselves..

And after that they continued to fidget anxiously...

"I already know that you're acting weird, that's why... why don't you stop that?"

Ouka peeked from behind the wall and whispered to Takeru

"What are you talking about Kusanagi. Aren't you worrying about Suginami? After receiving such a letter, we can't sit still."

Ouka said that to Takeru from below while using binoculars.

Next was Mari who was below Ouka, she looked at Ouka and teased her.

"That's why you thought about stalking her...? That letter, isn't it just a prank?"

After Mari said that, Usagi's face peaked from below her.

"Even so, it doesn't change the fact that she was acting weird. There's definitely something going on."

Usagi said confidently, she was in favor of monitoring.

Usagi was at the bottom, next was Mari above her, above Mari, there was Ouka, and Takeru was on on top, they all peaked out from behind the wall. Looking at them from a perspective, they looked like a dumplings on a stick.

Currently, they were in middle of stalking Ikaruga.

Ikaruga left the Academy and got on a bus heading to the outskirts. Takeru and the others were observing her movements from as far as possible.

"The Dragoon race hall is in completely different direction... why did she lie."

Usagi recalled the letter had said 'betrayal', but shook her head denying it.

Ouka stopped looking through binoculars and showed a difficult face.

"I don't intend to be fooled by that letter, I don't know much about Suginami. But there is a chance... hey."

"Uwaa... really～ Ootori-san...you're so skeptical to suspect a comrade～ well, you've been skeptical from the very beginning—"

Mari said that and made a face full of contempt, and then,

bang, was hit with Ouka's chin.

"O-ouchhhhhh! What are you doing!"

"That's because you said something annoying."

"Buuut, isn't that truue."

"I don't think being suspicious is a bad thing. It's necessary to ascertain the truth to prove her innocence. When we confirm that she's innocent, I will apologize. Even if I were to be hated, I would just continue to apologize, I think that's fine."

"...then, what if you are convinced of her guilt, just like it was with me..."

Mari who had her own debt, made a slightly sorrowful expression.

Ouka, whose face was hovering above Mari's made an uncomfortable expression and glared at Mari from above.

And——**bang**.

"I-It huuuurts! What again!?"

"That's because you said something boring."

"Whaaat? I just said I feel slightly guilty!"

"Guilty? That sounds really shallow."

"Y-youuu...!"

"If you have time to feel something like that, you better use it to save people just as you said you will."

Mari twisted and trembled, while Ouka snorted.

They didn't know each other for long, but Takeru and Usagi sympathized with Ouka's feelings.

She's embarrassed... She's definitely embarrassed...

Thought both Takeru and Usagi.

She definitely wanted to say "you're weren't the one at fault".

Even so... why did she have to lie to us?

Although he didn't believe in that letter, he didn't know why did she lie to them about taking a few days' rest. Prying into her private life was no good, but considering the discomfort he felt this morning, the letter wouldn't leave his head.

Suginami Ikaruga betrayed the Academy.

Betrayed? For whom?

Doubts clouded Takeru's mind, and he followed Ouka without question.

After leaving the outskirts, Ikaruga continued to a street that was less crowded.

The landscape gradually turned simple, and the devastation became more noticeable.

While they were moving behind the building, Mari suddenly stopped.

"Eh... this way is, it can't be."

Mari looked around as she said that.

"Wait, Suginami stopped."

Ikaruga completely stopped walking by the crossroads right beside the signals.

The Four of them looked at her puzzled.

That's when large trucks passed in front of Takeru and the others blocking their view. After a few seconds, the platoon lost sight of Ikaruga.

"——Wha?!"

Takeru raised his voice surprised.

After the truck has passed, Ikaruga was no longer there. Takeru ran towards the signals in a hurry, and stood where Ikaruga had been earlier.

"Where did she go?!"

"There are no alleys here. And escaping from our eyes with Suginami's reflexes is impossible."

"M-maybe she really disappeared... that's not possible, right?"

Takeru and the others looked around flustered.

They searched for ten minutes, but in the end couldn't find Ikaruga.

Only Mari looked below their feet.

"...Suginami... probably, she went to the border."

She murmured, and then immediately continued.

"The whole area around here, obviously there aren't many people are there? Even buildings, they look like the ones over there. It's a proof that the border is close. There should be a checkpoint right there."

"The border... but you can't go past the checkpoint without a permit, right? I've heard it's impossible to get in there without a permit?"

"You're so naive Takeru. If crossing was impossible, then how do Magical Heritage dealers like me get into the town?"

Mari was squatting on the ground, and she hit the manhole with her fist.

"...underground."

Ouka made a bitter face.

"That how it is. I'm not really sure, but it seems like there used to be a subway under this place, there's an absurd amount of passes underground. For the sake of transporting goods during the war, it was expanded further. Currently the underground is like a labyrinth.

Hearing Mari's words, Ouka crossed her arms depressingly.

"Setting up a checkpoint in an underground passage is impossible. At most a patrol can be sent, but there's a limit to that as well."

"It's a transport line known and used by many people, because there's no way to blockade it."

"How deplorable. If it was properly maintained, this muffler woman wouldn't be here now."

"If Inquisition knew someone like me wouldn't——hey, wait a sec?!"

"You again...!"

The two of them were about to start arguing again, but Usagi put one hand on her face in front of the manhole.

"The-then, did we completely lose sight of Suginami?"

"...I have a map of the underground labyrinth in my head, but not knowing where is she heading we won't be able to catch up to her. At worst case, we might get separated."

"That's can't be..."

"Reacting to Mari's words, Usagi made face as if she was about to cry

Casting skeptical gazes at Mari and the depressed Usagi, Ouka put a hand on Takeru's shoulder.

"What do we do, Kusanagi. Chase her?"

Questioned by Ouka, Takeru frowned.

Now he was regretting the fact that he didn't stop and question her when he felt the discomfort in platoon's room.

It was possible that Ikaruga was caught up in something outrageous, and headed to the border using the underground passage only criminals used. She wouldn't go there without a reason.

Was there a reason she lied to Takeru and the others?

...no. It didn't matter,

There could only be one conclusion.

"——There's no other choice than to chase her, we can't leave her alone in the border."

He tensed his face and said to Ouka.

If she's stirring up something, or if she's been dragged into something, they could only follow.

Follow her, and confirm. And if they confirm it's something troublesome, they would carry it together as comrades.

Ouka expected that answer, and nodded slightly.

"I also agree with it, however... there's something I have to say first."

Ouka put some strength into the hand she placed on his shoulders.

"If by any chance Suginami is involved with bad things, I will carry out my duty."

"...meaning, you will arrest her?"

Ouka looked straight into Takeru's eyes.

That was her nature, if Ikaruga had her hand in wrongdoings, then he will not stop her. That's even more of a reason to stop her.

"It's all right. If she tries to escape I won't stop you from that, however, you absolutely can't kill her. Even for me, Suginami is... umm, that is..."

Ouka averted her eyes, then look at him, she looked back and forth in panic.

"S-she's an important comrade to you right? I promise not to shoot her."

"Got it. But, wait until we get the evidence... or at least until we hear the truth from her."

"Of course, that's what I intended."

As soon as he heard Ouka's reply, Takeru looked at Usagi. She was facing down, her mouth was closed tightly.

Ikaruga and Usagi were the ones who got along the best in the platoon. She wouldn't ever admit it, but Takeru thought they were best friends.

Takeru placed a hand on the anxious Usagi's head, and lightly stroked it.

"Don't worry. I'm sure it's something like illegal modification parts available only in the border, she probably went to buy some rare metals."

"...but Suginami, she never came out of the Academy's premises, not even once..."

With that said, Takeru was reminded that he never saw her going out of the school grounds.

She always acted as an operator during missions, and was living in the campus dormitories.

Although Takeru was also suspicious, he made a bitter smile and made a small lie.

"I've been hanging with her for four years now, she went to watch the Dragoon race before you know? You worry too much, Usagi."

"...is that so, then it's fine."

Usagi's depression was also one of things he was concerned about.

While Takeru comforted her, Mari placed hands on her hips and looked at all the members.

"It can't be helped. I'll help you look for Suginami. I owe you guys after all."

Mari puffed up her flat chest.

Ouka glared at Mari while performing a check on her equipment.

"You go back. People who wear a Gleipnir can go out to town at most, the border is out of acceptable range. Also, a witch who can't use magic will be of no help to us."

Ouka sharply protested against Mari's decision. Mari turned her shocked face and poked the collar attached to her neck after loosening her muffler.

"This collar is specially made, you know that right. It has an inhibitory effect, and I can't take it off normally. I will die in prison if I remove it. If I run away, you will report to the president and I will die when it explodes."

Also, she added while laughing.

"I'm confident that I'll be more useful than you? I know the way to the border by using the underground pass. As long as I am here, I promise we'll get there safely. In the first place, is there anyone other than me who can give you directions?"

"…………"

"Oh? You have no confidence? Why do you look away〜there there〜."

"Annoying!! Don't poke my cheek!"

Ouka's cheek was poked, in revenge she grabbed Mari's cheek and pulled on it. Another bitter screaming match started between the two of them.

Nothing changed, even during this emergency situation.

"...but, you said before that there's no way of telling which way Suginami went? What do we do?"

With Usagi's question, Ouka and Mari stopped bickering.

Takeru also considered it, but he couldn't think of anything.

Honestly, he wanted to ask Inquisition for help, however that was only if there was no other option. If they learn about their entering the border without permission, they would be suspended, and in the worst case expelled. If they got involved with something bad, they might get arrested before they could even explain.

Takeru continued to think.

The moment he lowered his face and looked down.

"——Host, are you having trouble?"

In front of him, there were empty eyes devoid of light.

Suddenly Lapis appeared, Takeru fell back and left an ass print on the ground.

About the time Takeru and the others decided to chase her. Ikaruga entered the underground passage, and while not losing her way walked through labyrinth as complicated as spider web.

It was the second time she was passing through here.

Even though she was here a few years ago, she still firmly remembered the directions.

Ikaruga took out a mobile phone from the breast pocket of her lab coat.

"It's me. Right now, I'm heading to the border through the underground passage."

《"Got it. I will tell the men to expect you. Did you bring it?"》

After hearing that, Ikaruga sighed.

"If you mean the Lost Matrix, then I've got it. Don't worry, I intend to return it to the fifth laboratory."

《"............"》

"That's why, you also make sure to keep your promise, Isuka."

A clear voice sounded in the underground pass.

《"In exchange for Lost Matrix you want to help with the experiment, was it. "》

"That's right."

《"...you have betrayed Alchemist. Even if you come back now, it's not a place for you."》

"I don't really care about getting back my position. I'm just curious about the restoration of elves."

After she said that, Isuka remained silent for a while.

《"If you are that interested, then why did you steal the Lost Matrix four years ago? "》

"If I stayed there, I would have died from boredom and lack of work. Also, I didn't take the high quality Lost Matrix with intention of stopping the experiment, I wanted to continue the experiment outside."

《"............"》

"But in the end, it was a failure. Because the equipment is too poor, I couldn't restore them. That's why I want to go back to Alchemist."

《"——Don't lie. Who would believe you, one who learned ethics."》

Answering Ikaruga who told her the reason frivolously, Isuka immediately denied it.

《"What's your real objective? What are you planning."》

"............hey, don't you think this exchange is meaningless? You want the Lost Matrix, I want to get back into the laboratory. Is that no good for you?"

Ikaruga said it fed up, and started to walk faster.

《"Fine then. I don't get what you intend. You will get what you want... however."》

Just when Isuka seemed to accept it, she quietly added.

《"...if you try to get in my way again, I won't show any mercy."》

She said those words refusing her and immediately terminated the call.

Ikaruga continued to hold the mobile next to her ear for a while after the sound signalizing the end of the call rang.

Just as Mari said, the underground passage was very complicated.

There was light here and there, proof that it was still in use, but the path Mari used was almost completely dark. A lot of them were poorly made and were used for transporting goods during the war, or were rushed tunnels made for infiltration.

After the war, criminals and refugees from the border quickly connected the passages, finishing the underground labyrinth.

"NNW, a hundred and fifty meters in a line straight ahead."

Behind Mari who went first, Lapis indifferently continued to inform them of Ikaruga's current location.

Mari stood still every time Lapis did that and proceeded after a few seconds when she selected a path.

"A hundred and fifty meters ahead in a straight line... isn't that in gray city... Let's hurry up. It isn't that far, but the road isn't straight."

Mari said towards the small lights coming from wristwatch-type devices. Takeru followed up with a voice of admiration.

"You really did well not to get lost even though you only knew the approximate position."

"I'm not a witch just for show. If you're surprised by just this much, seeing operative procedures for magic would make you faint, Takeru."

Ueeh, Takeru made a pained expression. Ouka who was beside him snorted in response.

"The one who surprises me is Suginami. She used the shortest possible route to the border... she seems to be accustomed to going over there, or she hired someone to guide her."

Mari asked as she moved on the rough path.

While following Mari, Takeru put a hand on Lapis' shoulder.

"Thank you, because you are here we can keep up with Suginami."

"No. Don't mind it. I only do whatever is within my ability to help Host."

She responded indifferently.

"You should be more happy for being praised. You're a very useful Relic Eater. There aren't many Magical Heritages who can be used in so many ways."

"..........."

"...I praised you, why don't you say something?"

"..........."

Even reminded by Mari, Lapis didn't react. She was expressionless like usual, making soundless footsteps, like a ghost.

Mari's eye convulsed, and the way she walked revealed irritation.

Usagi who was walking behind also watched Lapis with a mysterious look at her face.

"That's creepy. Why doesn't she react when we talk to her, not even returning a glance? Ootori also has a Relic Eater right? Are all of them like that?"

"I don't know, I'm not interested. I have no idea how magic thinks."

Ouka who had a magic allergy, was clearly hostile towards Lapis.

Even though she openly directed her hostility towards her, Lapis' expression didn't change at all.

Aside from Sougetsu and Takeru, Lapis rarely reacted to people who spoke to her. Even though she was always by his side, her standing in the platoon was very subtle and special.

She wasn't a regular member, it was just that she was usually beside Takeru. If possible he wanted her to adapt to other members... that's what Takeru thought.

"We arrived. This is a good place to come outside. It should be relatively safe above."

Mari pointed at the manhole above as she spoke.

The city where both police and Inquisition are, and the border were like entirely different worlds.

Those who come in realize it as soon as they leave the checkpoint. The streets are no longer there because of war, smashed asphalt, and because the only usable buildings are the ones made before the war, it was a horrible sight.

A lot of vagrants holding their knees on the side of the road can be seen.

As they proceeded, there was a square that acted as a gang's hang out, and a residential area which was human's refuge. Eventually they entered a downtown that seemed to flourish.

The downtown was called Evil Street, a place of gambling and prostitution where the mafia acted like the police.

And, even further ahead,

There was a location that was the closest to the Akashic Hazard's area, the "Sanctuary".

The place was called Gray City, a lawless area even Inquisition feared to enter, said to house a number of witches.

"…………"

Ikaruga entered the border as scheduled, and walked in front of a certain junk shop.

She didn't enter the store, instead she stood in the middle of the road and looked up at the sky.

"...there's no need to be on alert. You don't need to force me to go with you."

As she told that and sighed, there was movement in the area.

From the back alley and broken windows of the junk shop, several men equipped with assault rifles and bulletproof vests came out and pointed their muzzles at Ikaruga.

Ikaruga placed her hands on top of her head and waited unmoving.

All of them were equipped with first class Alchemist-made goods.

Judging from the way they acted and the way they were dressed, they must have been from a private military company.

"...Suginami Ikaruga?"

"Indeed."

"Show us your ID card."

The mercenary instructed her while looking through weapon sights and she slowly removed the ID card from her lab coat pocket and threw it to the mercenaries.

A mercenary caught it with one hand and after sharply staring at Ikaruga, he turned his sight to the ID for only a moment.

And a moment later,

"...confirmed. Show me the article of trade."

"No way. If I pass it to you, you will kill me here and now right? This is hundred times more expensive than the money you were hired for. I don't have a reason to show it to money mongers like you."

"Show it. I'm not asking, I'm ordering you to."

"In exchange for this Lost Matrix I was promised to be taken there. I will protect it, and I will not give it to you."

Ikaruga said that to all of them with a strong attitude.

Mercenaries around her suddenly released blood lust.

Ikaruga looked at them as if she saw something silly.

"...boring and vulgar."

She muttered with an extremely calm attitude.

They left the underground passage while keeping track of Ikaruga, Takeru and the others arrived on the surface after successfully crossing to the border.

"——Why did it turn out like this?!"

They ended up in the middle of fugitives.

It was good that they came out to the surface, however the place they surfaced was a site of a Magical Heritage trading mafia.

Obviously, because they were wearing AntiMagic Academy's uniforms they were thought of to be conducting an investigation and were intercepted before they had time to negotiate. The enemy was poorly equipped, but they couldn't handle so many of them.

The four of them dashed into a back alley, the enemy desperately scattered.

"What the heck! You said that you're familiar with the border, and that this outlet was safe! It's not safe at all!"

Ouka yelled at Mari while shooting her gun behind.

"It can't be helped right!? It's been half a year since I've been in the border! It must've changed after so long! I don't know myself why there is a trade happening in a place like this!"

"You're useless after all!"

"Even Usagi-chan—! Just because I didn't know about it doesn't mean I'm useless!"

Mari responded to the accusations while being out of breath as she ran.

Takeru dropped his speed and stopped after sliding at a T-junction, and immediately asked Lapis.

"Lapis! Where's Suginami's location?!"

"SSE, it's left."

He turned left as instructed by Lapis who ran by his side without breathing.

However, one of them, Mari couldn't keep up with their mobility and bent, almost falling down.

"This third wheel...!"

Ouka intended to return after she stopped in her tracks, but before that, Takeru used Soumatou and flew to where Mari was.

He held her in her arms and started running again to join Ouka.

"Aaa, uueeh?!"

"Don't move! Put up with it for a while!"

He advised the blushing Mari, and aimed at the exit of the back alley.

Being held in both arms and facing him, it seemed like she was incredibly embarrassed, and "awawawa" leaked from her mouth.

There was no choice since it was an emergency.

Even though they knew that, he felt a mysterious hostility and resentment from both of his sides.

""...you should have left her there.""

"You guys are really unforgiving, aren't you!?"

"Don't talk, hurry up! We need to lose them before we join up with Suginami!"

Takeru gave out orders and ran straight down the road while holding Mari.

Ahead, he saw the light.

"Head over there, there's a reaction a bit to the right."

"——All right!!"

Takeru lowered his waist and increased his speed.

And at that moment, from the light on the other side,

Takeru was a bit late in grasping the situation.

About the same time, on the second floor of the building across the street, there was a woman holding a sniper rifle who was spying on Ikaruga and the mercenaries.

She was one of Inquisition's Dullahans, a direct subordinate of Kurogane Hayato, the captain of EXE.

Her name was Oonogi Kanata, she was the woman who served as his assistant during the time of the attack on the tournament.

"——Oonogi here, the target made contact with someone who looks like a trading partner. Considering their equipment, they're probably mercenaries hired by Alchemist."

《"Got it. What is the 35th Test Platoon doing?"》

"Sure enough, they lost their way."

《"That's convenient. They should be left alone for now. We'll recover them later."》

"Is that fine? Certainly, the Chairman..."

《"It's fine if you just follow my orders."》

As Hayato instructed from a distance, she took a deep breath, feeling dissatisfied.

"Today I should be off duty... why is it me... even though I have a reservation in Cake Viking... oh come on."

《"Don't complain with your communicator on."》

"Was no other member of EXE qualified for this? I-I'm still a newcomer."

《"There is no one more competent than you who came from Banshee."》

"...? Does that mean, that you picked me because of my abilities?"

She asked through the intercom a bit happy.

《"No, that's because you were the one with the most time."》

The words that came from the other side weren't the ones she desired causing her to make a grumpy face again. She continued to look at the enemy with her left eye through the scope.

"The enemies are five mercenaries, from my vantage point I can easily subdue them."

《"...I leave the timing to you. Before Suginami Ikaruga is taken away, clear them out and leave only her."》

"Understood."

She toggled the switch of the intercom, and tried to contact a comrade. In this mission, there were three other members of EXE involved, they were scattered around with the mission of monitoring Ikaruga and recovering the Lost Matrix. Three other people surrounded their objective while hiding themselves with optical camouflage while standing in positions allowing them to rush in at any time.

Hayato took command of the mission from headquarters and Kanata issued instructions on the field. In order to instruct the others, she waited for their responses.

"This is Oonogi, is everyone prepared?"

《"""............"""》

"? This is Oonogi, respond. Are the preparations for the attack..."

There was no answer. It was strange.

Just when she thought that, she saw something on the edge of her field of view and looked away from the scope.

In her field of view, about ten meters away from the place where the mercenaries and Ikaruga were, in the corner of the alley there was a familiar figure of a boy holding a girl in both of his arms.

"T-those kids——why with this timing!"

Kanata aimed the muzzle immediately at the mercenary closest to Ikaruga.

After thinking of stopping for a moment, Takeru devoted himself to accept the situation.

On his right, there was Ikaruga surrounded by several armed mercenaries. Ikaruga was hit in the cheek with a punch and fell to the ground.

A man was about to kick her while aiming a muzzle at her. Takeru looked at it with wide opened eyes.

Also Ikaruga, not knowing why Takeru was in this place was wondering of why would he be here.

When Takeru comprehended what was going on, anger welled up from inside of him before he noticed. This feeling was like the one when sword was made fun of, it couldn't be suppressed.

He put Mari down immediately and put a hand on his sword.

And like an antelope, he prepared to kick off the ground.

———_*bang* *bang*_

Someone shot twice from behind his back.

He didn't need to check, it was Ouka. Her gun's barrel was visible by his right shoulder.

"——Jump in!"

Ouka told him.

With just that much, Takeru regained sanity. Rather than defeating the enemy right now, the priority was to help Ikaruga.

Immediately after, he sheathed his sword and kicked off the ground.

He tackled the man who was about to kick Ikaruga, since he was using Soumatou, the man was blown away.

There was a sound of the man's ribs being crushed, and he was blown away like a puppy hit by a car.

Although it almost dislocated Takeru's shoulder, the enemy wasn't caught completely off guard.

"Wha——eeh?!"

One of mercenaries seeing his comrade being blown away, impatiently directed the gun's muzzle at Takeru.

Takeru picked up Ikaruga without regard to it, and his mouth arced as he looked at the mercenary who aimed at him.

Before the mercenary could understand why Takeru laughed, the mercenary collapsed because an anesthesia bullet hit his temple.

Without looking back, Takeru kicked off the ground again.

He could trust Ouka. With how many people there were, they would come out of it intact.

Takeru dove into shade of a building and ensured Ikaruga's safety.

"...did you follow me...?"

Although she expected it, it wasn't welcome.

After separating from Takeru, as if she was disappointed, she placed a hand on her forehead.

"...I'll take any criticism later. Those guys just now——"

"It's better if you stop now. It's impossible for you guys."

"What are you talking about, with Ootori there that much is..."

Just when Takeru was about to say so, communication came from the intercom.

《"Kusanagi! Don't come back! Take Suginami and run awayyy!"》

With a voice that seemed like a scream.

"Ah—come on!!"

Beyond that building was outside of her sniper rifle's range, she started shooting providing covering fire for Ouka.

She no longer cared if her position was exposed. Kanata couldn't stop herself from shooting.

《"Oonogi."》

"I apologize, the mission failed. I understand there will be severe punishment. But I couldn't stay silent in such situation——"

《"I don't mind. You've done well. Provide them cover."》

"Eh?!!"

《"Just don't kill the mercenaries. We'll capture them and have them spit information. Leave Suginami to Kusanagi."》

"Is that alright?"

《"I've already told you I don't mind."》

Kanata was certain that she had to listen to Hayato's orders from above at all times, but she was now puzzled by his unexpected reply.

She was a fool to act like a sweetie all this time, now that she had the Captain's stamp of approval, there was no reason to hesitate.

"——Roger!"

Kanata fired accurately at the mercenaries who directed their muzzles at Ouka. She shot all the enemies who were glued to Ouka. She should be able to take them all out with a suppressor-equipped rifle.

That's when.

From behind where Ouka was shooting with her handgun, a loud sound generated by the engine or caterpillar could be heard. Ouka also noticed it, and jumped into shadow where her comrades were hidden.

Immediately after that, two Dragoon machines jumped on the field.

It wasn't just two. Three more machines were on top of a building, it were new models equipped with rocket launchers.

That was careless. She couldn't get in touch with her fellow Banshees because of those guys.

Kanata was horrified, thoughts rotated at high speed in her head.

What to do? Her current equipment was insufficient for fighting against Dragoons.

I need to join up with 35th Test Platoon——

When she thought about that, all expressions disappeared from her face.

The sense she developed when she was in Banshee deprived her of all thoughts.

"Captain Kurogane, can you hear me?"

《"What is it?"》

"It seems like I can't help them."

《"…………"》

While saying that, Kanata folded the poised sniper rifle and stood up.

"There's a machine behind me."

She pulled the bolt and prepared for combat.

《"You screwed up."》

"I apologize."

《"There's no permission to use a Relic Eater. You have to do it with your normal equipment."》

"Roger."

《"Failing a mission is unforgivable. No matter what, you have to survive."》

"Roger."

Immediately after, behind Kanata there was sound of an indirect drive starting. With an electronic sound the optical camouflage was cut off. A big shadow appeared behind her.

"Plan change, Oonogi Kanata, to turn around the situation."

——The muzzle of sniper rifle turned around, at the same time the Dragoon raised its blade, Kanata pulled the trigger.

Takeru listened to the report from Ouka, he wanted to return there immediately but was too horrified.

Two Dragoons.

No, there were three more machines on top of the buildings.

The two machines crushed the asphalt beneath its feet and went into the back alley to chase Ouka and the others. And the three from above, jumped over the buildings using their boosters and followed them as well.

Takeru couldn't endure it, and tried to jump after Ouka.

One of three machines noticed where Takeru was, and aimed its rocket launcher at him.

———This is bad!

A chill ran down his spine, and Takeru jumped into the back alley to protect Ikaruga.

Together with a distinctive sound of launching, it fired and the missile hit the entrance to the back alley.

Sounds of explosions rang out.

With a slight delay, the blast hit Takeru's back.

The rocket destroyed the alley's wall, and debris fell down.

"......guh."

Takeru tried to raise his body from under the rubble, but he felt intense pain in his waist.

Without giving any sound, he swallowed the pain.

"We have no time to spare. The road was blocked by the rubble, but it can be broken through with a Dragoon's brute strength."

"We're running, can you stand?"

"............"

Takeru grabbed Ikaruga's hand and pulled her up.

Ikaruga looked at Takeru accusingly as he almost detached her arm.

"Shitt... Ootori and the others... comms won't go through."

While spitting curses, he tried to call Ouka many times through the intercom, but there was no reaction.

It was the worst possible situation, **clap**, Takeru grabbed his head.

Takeru continued to go on instructed by Ikaruga, they had to lose the enemy first. Ikaruga was just like Mari, accustomed to moving inside the border and seemed to choose less popular and safe passages.

Takeru desperately kept up with Ikaruga's speed.

The speed wasn't too big because of how Ikaruga's motor senses were.

Even so, Takeru was losing breath more than Ikaruga, and his body started to sway.

He was very pale, as if he was already dead. He stood in a spot and took a deep breath.

"Sorry... can you hide yourself somewhere around here? Just stay there and wait for me."

"..........."

Ikaruga who was standing in front stopped, and looked at Takeru.

From her expression, it seemed like she was angry.

"Kusanagi, what are you going to do?"

"I need to find them. For a while now... I couldn't contact them."

After he said that, Ikaruga suddenly closed on Takeru and pulled on his shoulder.

She used force to turn the staggering Takeru around, and looked at his waist.

There were pieces of glass stuck deeply in his waist.

A huge amount of blood continued to flow from it.

Ikaruga put his arm around her neck and on her shoulder as he staggered.

"We're going to my hideout. It's no joke if you damaged your kidney. You'll die with no treatment."

"Even so... I'm not going."

"Silence. Don't piss me off any more."

"...let go, Ootori and the others..."

"Shut up. You reap what you sow."

"?! You——"

"Shut up."

She was definitely angry. Ikaruga glared at him.

It was his first time seeing Ikaruga make an angry expression.

While lending her shoulder to Takeru, Ikaruga took out a mobile phone from her pocket and made a call.

"...Isuka? Sorry, but the schedule went crazy."

《"I have received a report. Was that your trap? You did something stupid."》

"Don't misunderstand. That was mishandled. These guys are from my school's test platoon. My... acquaintances. All of them."

《"I can't trust you."》

"In that case, I'll say this. Next time get better mercenaries... they almost killed me."

《"..........."》

"As a price for being targeted, I have a request."

《"...say it."》

"If your mercenaries happen to catch the guys from the test platoon... you're not to kill any of them."

《"Your request is just that?"》

"If you kill them you will get 'that'."

《"...very well. They've already been captured. They were to be used as bargain chips. You still haven't recovered my trust. It's only a trade."》

"Fine. I'll contact you from my side again."

Ikaruga ended the call immediately after saying that.

Takeru heard a voice of a person from the other end, but he couldn't tell what were they talking about. Gunfire and explosions could be heard in a distance. Like an echo.

Somewhere, Ikaruga's voice entered his head and echoed, but his consciousness dimmed.

"You did something unnecessary... because of that my plan failed."

Ikaruga breathed out and said to Takeru.

"Why did you chase me. There's no point staying silent after coming this far."

"...I was...worried... about, you..."

"In the end, it's probably the handiwork of that rotten Chairman anyway. Probably, he said something like me being a traitor, that's what he told you isn't it."

Ikaruga said coldly.

Takeru, barely conscious while keeping his weight on Ikaruga, rebutted while breathing painfully.

"A traitor, that wasn't... I didn't care about that..."

"…………"

"I thought you might… be caught in something troublesome… also…"

"…………"

"Because, you always try to solve everything alone… don't you… but."

"…………"

"…I won't let you… to carry it… all alone."

"That's enough. Stop saying whatever you want, when you don't know how the other person feels."

She accused him, but it could no longer reach Takeru's ears. **shhh**. The weight on Ikaruga's shoulder increased.

Ikaruga proceeded into a dim alley while dragging Takeru's weight.

Chapter 3 - Suginami Ikaruga

Alchemist's fifth laboratory, central tower, top floor.

In a place called level 6, Isuka put a hand on the incubator after she finished speaking with Ikaruga.

"Four years... that was longer than expected."

She said that and covered her face with her left hand.

A memory of a betrayal from four years ago revived in her head.

The place she belonged to collapsed, it was a humiliating memory.

But Isuka's facial expressions didn't reveal it.

She only needed a mind dedicated to research, that is all. That's how she was taught.

She threw away unnecessary feelings.

Forcibly.

"With this, my suffering will finally end."

Whether she was crying or laughing, all of it could be hidden with a palm of her hand.

"My hell finally ends."

Isuka muttered to no one in particular, and stroked the incubator.

Peeking from behind her hand, were eyes full of madness, and she wholeheartedly laughed.

"Hey, isn't that right? Ikaruga."

The dreadful sound was like the gasp of the dead from the bottom of the abyss.

* * *

"——Then, the uproar in this case is all an isolated action from just the fifth weapons laboratory?"

Inside the chairman's office, Sougetsu lit a rare cigar and spoke to the receiver with a strong tone in his voice.

After receiving report of the mission's failure from Hayato, there were no more problems with Sougetsu's plan. He already received information from the arrested mercenaries.

Sougetsu created the opportunity to strike and brand the Alchemist, and obtain full authority.

After concluding the Alchemist wanted to recreate the elves. Proving their relationship with Valhalla would be a matter of time.

To prevent the restoration in advance, they will seize all of Alchemist's technology.

And the second goal, was obtaining technology of processing first-class anti-magic material. Dragoon's. The elf restoration. All of these could be made by Inquisition at any time.

Sougetsu should be able to obtain all that power.

The raid could turn into war, but he didn't care.

However, not everything goes so well,

Whether it was Inquisition's or Alchemist, people standing on top of those were villains.

The person Sougetsu spoke with, was the Representative Director from Alchemist's headquarters.

《"Yes. If I remember well, we issued a permit for studies on elves, but we don't tolerate research that would go into gray zone."》

"It's not just elves. The Dragoons used in attack on the tournament, they were something you guys developed as well, right? The evidence obtained from the wreckage points makes it obvious that Alchemist was involved in this uproar."

《"So you say, however. We are a company. We continuously sell merchandise, also we're legally selling Dragoons to private sector. We're not responsible for what customers do with the Dragoons after we sell them."》

"Don't stray away from the topic. The ones that were invited to the opening ceremony wasn't some other company, but your Alchemist."

《"Even though you say that, we have no knowledge of such thing. Where did you order the Dragoon's that were unveiled at the tournament?"》

"............it was close by, so we ordered them at fifth weapons development laboratory."

《"Ufufu."》

He could hear a sexy laughter from the receiver, Sougetsu became angry. It was bad, he clicked his tongue in secret.

At this rate, they will push all responsibility on the fifth laboratory. The headquarters will be able to get off by saying they didn't know anything.

He won't let them. Sougetsu went on a counter-attack.

"Even so, if you look at it from another perspective, even if that was an arbitrary decision of fifth weapon development laboratory, you cannot escape from taking responsibility. That won't pass. So how do you intend to take responsibility for it?"

《"Hmm, mm. We acknowledge that as well, yeah. That's for the inconvenience we caused this time, you have my apologies from the bottom of my heart."》

"Only a verbal apology, is it."

《""No, no such thing. As an apology... oh that's right, we'll provide you 250 of the latest model Dragoon "Enkidou" free of charge."》

Humbly... it seemed like they kept low profile.

He caught something valuable. But the other party was a snob, which irritated Sougetsu who was a snob as well.

"Are those dragons going to have that weird remodeling as well?"

《"Safe and secure, our motto we say with a smile."》

"...suspicious."

《"With our pride on the line, we assure you that there will be no such thing."》

Pride. Saying that was a foul play. Thought Sougetsu.

"I acknowledge that you really do feel sorry for that. And I accept the token of apology. However, we will undertake all necessary actions to crush fifth weapons development laboratory."

《"I am aware of that. We shall deliver the required machines. Please crush and kill them all until there's nothing left."》

It was said lightly and with confidence, causing Sougetsu to narrow his eyes.

There was no need to restrain themselves anymore. In order to cut the chase, Sougetsu let out.

"After we're done with crushing it, we will of course thoroughly check your headquarters. If we find anything there, we will immediately prosecute you."

Sougetsu declared while peeling off the façade from before.

《"Yes. Do as you please, we don't mind."》

"..........."

《"We're fine with it, we hope for Inquisition Board's patronage in the future. That is why this is a good opportunity to prove our innocence and get along better. You're welcome to do a thorough investigation."》

And with that said, the call was immediately ended.

Sougetsu was dumbfounded, and froze.

After hearing the sound signaling the end of the call, laughter raged, welling up from his throat.

"I expected that from the very beginning. That female fox... even if we searched we wouldn't find anything."

He threw away the handset and stood up.

"Considering the way they talked back, it seems like there's nothing that would point at the involvement of Valhalla with their headquarters left there."

The schedule went crazy, well that's fine. We'll get a lot anyway.

He walked up to the hanger by the desk's side, and wore an exaggerated white uniform of Inquisition.

"...did it go well?"

A secretary in a suit came bringing tea and asked.

"Immediately have all available Dullahans gathered at the front gate."

"...what does this mean?"

"Also, in about thirty minutes Dragoons should come from Alchemist headquarters, adjust them as soon as possible, tell Reginns to be ready for sortie at any time."

"Umm... that's, where to?"

The secretary asked.

Sougetsu opened a black case, and took out a beautiful musket decorated with silver from inside.

"Well..."

He strongly rotated the musket with a bayonet attached, and strongly gripped it.

"Just for a little war～"

Wearing a white uniform, Sougetsu said that as if he was going shopping.

Somehow, he looked like he was having fun.

* * *

Fifth weapons development laboratory, fantastical creatures reproduction testing site.

In this place, there were many humans and fantastical creatures collected as materials for biological experiments.

It was illegal. Over the few recent years, the fifth laboratory studied chimeras in secret from the Inquisition. In cages made of crystal, there were a lot of gremlins and goblins raising their voices.

In one of them, there was something that stood out. Inside, there were three girls.

All three of them were stark-naked, they were sitting while embracing their bodies.

The three were Ouka, Mari, and Usagi.

"W-w-ww-what... will become of us."

Usagi asked as she trembled and hid her chest.

"I wonder. We might be stuffed into a potato-washing machine and turned into food for fantastical organisms, or as material for chimeras... I have no idea."

"Hiiiiiiiii..."

Mari was sitting cross-legged by the wall, and told Usagi about the danger. Usagi trembled like a rabbit suffering extreme cold.

"Uuu...**sob**... stripped naked, having every corner washed like an object... this is first time being treated like that. I can no longer be a bride..."

"Eeh, is that what you're bothered by? First we need to get out of this alive before you talk about being a bride."

"This is humiliating... it's shameful... even though, I decided that my first time will be with the person I love."

"You didn't lose anything yet! You didn't lose your first time yet! Where are you going Usagi-chan!"

"I've been dirtied... uu... uwaaaaaaaaaannnnn."

"...just how much of a pure maiden are you."

"Ni-Nikaido-san is just lacking delicacy. Why are you sitting cross-legged when you're naked?"

"No... there's no men here anyway, it's just us girls. Why don't you stop hiding yourself? Be more dignified you know, dignified."

"**sob**... don't lump me together with slutty girls..."

"I'm not slutty! And you're pissing me off! If you hide that much your belly will stand out!"

"...uu, **sob**."

In response, Usagi stared back at Mari with tears in her eyes.

Certainly dignified. Although it was dignified.

Usagi lowered her gaze and looked at Mari's chest.

Truly, they were tiny.

"If I was that small... if I was that small I wouldn't be ashamed either. Uuu..."

"What do you mean by that?! Size has nothing to do with it right?! Don't go crying after looking at someone's breastsss!"

Mari got angry and started ranting, and Usagi continued to cry.

Next to the two, stood Ouka with a firm attitude and glared to the side.

"You guys are noisy. If you have time for idle talk, think of a plan for escape."

Even though she said that, she hid her chest just like Usagi did.

Seeing that, Mari said "Those damn big breasts..." with envy and enmity.

"...what, then did you come up with anything?"

"I didn't, that's why I keep thinking."

"That's no good〜... when thinking doesn't help it's better to be at ease〜"

"I refuse. Rather than that you, you were trading information in the border right? Why is Alchemist trying to catch Suginami, do you have any idea?"

She inquired, Mari deliberately looked at the prison's ceiling.

"Yup, that's because Alchemist is pitch black."

"They were always sitting on the borderline, to think they were this rotten. Experiments with fantastical organisms are prohibited by law."

Ouka made a bitter face and hit the crystal wall.

"There is definitely some relation between this facility and Suginami... but why."

"............maybe, but."

Ouka turned around because of Mari's suggestive attitude.

"When I decided to side with Inquisition, I told them all information I had right? Among the information I told them, there was some about Alchemist plotting to restore the elves. They were just rumors, but Chairman persistently dug for information about that."

"...elves?"

"Yup. Just like during the Witch Hunt War, about wanting to use them as a weapon just like back then."

"How foolish, elves are an extremely dangerous existence, it won't go like the alchemists want it to. They're underestimating the reality of it."

"That's why I told you it's just an urban legend right? If it was possible Valhalla would have restored them already. Even Necromancers cannot revive fantastical organisms. This is just a dream——"

Just when Mari was saying that, unexpectedly.

"——No, it's not just a dream. Restoration of elves is possible."

There was a woman standing outside of prison before they noticed.

It was a very aloof person dressed in red lab coat, she looked familiar to Ouka and the others.

"Su... Suginami?"

They let out surprised voices.

"Indeed, I am Suginami. But, I'm slightly different from Suginami you know."

The dark red woman brushed her hair away and told them calmly.

Just as she said, after looking closely her appearance was slightly different from Ikaruga's. Even though their style and faces were similar, there were differences.

Her hair color wasn't obsidian black like Ikaruga's, but red-brown. The color of her skin also seemed darker than Ikaruga's.

"Who the hell... are you."

Ouka glared at the girl with great hostility. The girl shrugged it off, and continued with indifferent voice.

"I am Suginami Isuka. Ikaruga whom you know is one of my compatriots."

"? Suginami is... an Alchemist's employee, you mean?"

"Not an employee. Existences called "Suginami" are Alchemist's "results". Humans call us "Designs Children"."

"Designs Children", Ouka heard about them.

Using eggs and sperm of excellent humans, systematically and artificially producing geniuses by manipulating the genes. Magic is not involved, but it broke the balance of the world and was forbidden as a technology inducing discrimination.

But that it really existed, not even Ouka knew that.

"You guys will be used as bargain chips. I guarantee you won't be killed, so don't worry."

Because of Isuka's indifferent attitude, Mari snorted annoyed.

"Do you think we will believe you after we were stripped naked?"

Isuka ignored Mari's protest and looked at the three of them.

"I've heard you are Ikaruga's schoolmates. Is that true?"

"...so what."

Ouka glared at her.

"I was curious. I'm surprised that someone with such a bankrupt personality managed to interact with ordinary people like you."

"............"

"What really are you? Are you her friends? Or are you pawns used by her?"

Ouka and Mari frowned sharply.

They didn't know Ikaruga long, but both of them were angered by Isuka's words.

And, there was someone who was enraged even more,

"——We're best friends, and we understand her more than you do."

It was Usagi.

She was trembling because of anger, and with a weird voice she clearly stated they are friends.

Isuka tilted her head.

"You understand Ikaruga more than I do? Are you serious?"

"I-I'm serious."

"You know nothing about her."

To avoid laughing, Isuka breathed through her nose.

"She is not as simple as you guys think. She's the same as I am. Just like me, a moving mass of madness only seeking research."

Isuka put one hand on the crystal, and the other on her forehead.

"She's not interested in anything that's not sharp. If it isn't sharp, it's worthless. She pushes forward, forward, forward, aiming at the very tip. Ethics. Humanity. From the very beginning such concepts weren't integrated into us, Suginami. Unnecessary concept. The mind for research is all we have, that's the only thing moving Suginami. Influence from world outside of research and development makes no difference. We only care about the results. Only results make us climax. That's the kind of woman she is."

"——Don't lump her together with you!!"

Although Usagi yelled at Isuka, she was unfazed.

Isuka released her hand off her forehead, and glanced at Usagi through the crystal with her dark pupils.

"I get it. I'll tell you what kind of human is she. What kind of path we Suginami follow. I'll tell you all of it."

Isuka spoke quietly, she was so intimidating it was choking.

Ouka and the others learned the madness of Suginami.

* * *

When he opened his eyes, he saw an unknown ceiling.

Round and round, the ceiling fan was spinning.

Before he thought about where was this place, he dedicated himself to remembering what happened before.

He couldn't remember too well. Although that was probably because his head still didn't work too well. He felt that half of his body was strangely warm (especially his right arm). He felt as if he was about to fall asleep again.

"...did you wake up?"

And, he heard a voice from his right side.

Takeru moved his head to the right with his blurred consciousness.

——He froze.

Right beside him, there was a familiar beauty.

The beauty was embracing Takeru, it seemed like they were hugging each other while sleeping.

For some reason, she had only black underwear, and was covered with a blanket.

His right arm that was felt very warm for a while already, was sandwiched between her large breasts.

"...u-uu-u-umm, d-d-did I, b-b-by a-any c-c-ch-chance..."

"Good morning. Yesterday... it was pretty intense."

She made a sexy smile while blushing, the beauty, was in fact Ikaruga.

Unable to comprehend the current situation, he stood up from the bed.

Need to apologize. For now he needs to apologize.

"S-ss-s-s-sorry——o-oouuuuuuchhhh."

Severe pain ran through Takeru's waist, he moaned as he tried to get up.

He put a hand on his hip nearby, there was a gauze and bandages on the wounds.

And then, he finally remember what happened earlier.

As he writhed in severe pain on the bed, Ikaruga was by his side lying face down, and looked at Takeru with an expression of amusement on her face.

"It's obviously a joke. If you move you'll start bleeding."

"......this, did you do this?"

"That's right. The one who dragged you all the way here, and performed surgery on you was me."

After being told that, Takeru raised half of his body and confirmed his location.

It was a hotel room. A queen bed, refrigerator. Wall with strangely excessive decorations, yellow and pink lamps.

It felt like... a clearly suspicious hotel.

"I used it before I enrolled in school, my hideout. Quite pleasant isn't it?"

"...I'm not really sure but, you, you have a lot of medical knowledge."

"It's not really knowledge, just basic know-how. Your internal organs didn't seem to be hurt, but you didn't have enough blood. Fortunately, because there's electricity here, the refrigerators were running and it was a nice place to store transfusion packs. I had one set of equipment."

Ikaruga hit the bed with her feet repeatedly, then put another mint candy in her mouth.

"Umm... by the way Suginami-san, why are you naked?"

"Oh? You're happy with me wearing this? You're unexpectedly maniac."

"..........."

"...because you didn't have enough blood, your body temperature was too low. That's why I slept while hugging you."

After giving him a mocking glance, Ikaruga obediently said the real reason.

Takeru confirmed his own equipment lying by the wall, and tried to stand up.

Tried to, *clanik*, something pulled his body back.

After looking at it, he saw handcuffs on his left wrist that were connected with the bed's railing.

"This is not a part of the play. Because Kusanagi wouldn't listen to me go to help Ouka and the others as soon as he woke up, that's why I tied you up."

"...... You've foresaw everything haven't you."

"You will die if you go outside with these injuries. You better give up."

Ikaruga raised her naked body, and put a hand on his shoulder after crawling on all fours.

Thanks to that, the blanket fell off Ikaruga's body, he couldn't bear it and looked away.

Since he couldn't help it, he lied down on his back quietly.

And Ikaruga nestled herself right beside him.

"I can guarantee that Ootori and the others are alive... so you don't have to worry."

She said that like a mother to her child.

A serious expression, Ikaruga was completely different than usual.

"...that's my line. We came here because we were worried about you."

"I've told you before you collapsed, it's not your business. It's my problem and I will solve it on my own. You guys might die if you get involved."

He was stubborn, but Ikaruga was even more stubborn, Takeru knew that.

That's why he didn't intend to talk about the fact they chased her and remained silent.

However, to know the current status, he had a lot of questions.

"We have already thrust out necks into it... tell me, about yourself."

"Oh? Even though you didn't ask me even once, you do at a time like this?"

"Even I don't want to intrude on your privacy, unless something happens. If you felt like telling me, I would gladly listen."

"............"

"But now, it's not time for such things."

He frowned and glared at the ceiling.

"I'll tell you... I'm already prepared to carry that burden."

"...I, I liked the old Kusanagi who wasn't bothered with the affairs of the others."

"The old me is the past. That's no longer who I am."

As he said that, Ikaruga tightly hugged Takeru's arm.

"...if possible, I wanted to keep it a secret until I die, but it seems no longer possible."

Ikaruga slowly closed her eyes, and started to talk about herself.

How was she born, and what miracle had led her to the academy.

She spoke of her everything for the first time.

* * *

People called Suginami had no fathers, and no mothers.

Made thanks to genetic engineering, they were literally made in incubators.

For a long time, alchemists and scientists working in Alchemist have always left their sperm and eggs for future generations, in order for them to inherit the knack for technology.

What alchemists feared the most, was losing knowledge and skills.

The facility for training "Designs Children" was simple and harsh. In a room surrounded with white walls, those who inherited several hundred people developed superior weapons together. Single-mindedly, just that. Completely unlike humans, they single-mindedly aimed at technological advancement.

Those who didn't achieve the results were thrown out to the outside world as defective products. In order to survive, the geniuses were working day and night.

Ikaruga and Isuka stood out among Suginami.

All the weapons the two of them developed always had a high performance, and it was so peaky it ruled out the balance.

『""I'm not interested in anything that isn't peaky.""』

When asked by the Supervisor, they answered like that together.

The Supervisor looked at such individuals, his mouth wrinkled, and he made a distorted laughter.

At that time, Ikaruga and Isuka were six years old.

The two of them were officially welcomed in Alchemist corporation, and dispatched to fifth laboratory.

And had many achievements there.

『"——Today I succeeded making a transplant from a human into a griffon, amazing isn't it?"』

Ikaruga and Isuka reported the news as happily as usual.

『"Today I made a gas that killed fellow humans and showed their spirits. Praise me, praise me?"』

That was because, if the girls had achievements, they were given rewards.

『"Look, look. I made a bomb that only destroys human genes. It's very kind to the surroundings. Amazing? Hey, is it amazing?"』

And their rewards, were permissions for developing new weapons.

To make better ones, to kill humans more efficiently.

You are worth as much as the weapons you produce.

The two of them were taught so, they had no hesitation nor mercy, they produced inhumane weapons while remaining completely innocent.

Just like they were taught, producing was the meaning of life imposed on 『Suginami』.

『"Let's create a weapon that can kill more humans with a smaller budget."』

That was, the Alchemist's education policy.

Their talent, shocked even Alchemist.

Something nobody achieved after the Witch Hunt War ended, even the restoration of elves.

『"Hey, Isuka. What's a "mother"?"』

In their room, Ikaruga was reading a book as she sat by the wall and asked Isuka.

Isuka stared at something through a microscope, and answered with a difficult expression on her face.

『"Isn't that provider of the egg?"』

『"Hmm. Can I meet that provider?"』

『"She should have already died decades ago. Because the egg provider for both of us was the same, that makes us half sisters."』

『"The father?"』

『"Sperm donor for me was Trismegistos, yours was Paracelsus. I've heard they died a few hundred years ago."』

『"Hmm."』

『"Why did you ask about that? That doesn't matter right?"』

Isuka asked after separating herself from microscope.

Ikaruga was reading an old picture book. On the cover, there was a picture of a smiling child holding hands with people who looked like their father and mother.

That book wasn't something that would be normally brought into lab. It was with the body of a child that was sent in for studying.

The title of the book was "Canary's house", it was a book for teaching morals.

『"I was wondering for a while now, what is that book?"』

『"Nn? Just before, it was in the backpack of the sample."』

『"...hmm, it's good that it wasn't found before, interesting. What's the content?"』

『"It's a story about a canary bird becoming human."』

『"Ooh, that's truly interesting. Is it a book about genetic engineering? Or a pattern on how to transplant a bird's brain into human?"』

『"That's not it. The bird was lonely because he had no mother since birth, he became a human and created a family. A fairy tale, in other words it's a book to learn morality."』

When she heard that, Isuka's complexion changed.

『"This is bad. Hurry up and throw it out, if they find it, it won't end with a beating."』

Isuka furrowed her brows and tried to confiscate the book from Ikaruga.

As Isuka tried to steal the book, Ikaruga distanced herself from her by rolling away.

『"Isuka, I want to become a sea urchin."』

『"...ha?"』

『"A sea urchin. It's not only sharp, but it's pointed in all directions. Cool."』

『"Does that mean you want to become knowledgeable in many fields?"』

『"I want to know a lot of things."』

『"...those who have a mind of a researcher focus on one thing. In the end, we who are called geniuses are only humans. Our talent would scatter. The only thing we need to do is to develop weapons."』

Ikaruga looked away from the picture book, and stared at the ceiling.

『"Hey Isuka."』

『"What is it?"』

『"What's a family? What's a friend? What is love? What's a companion?"』

『"I don't know. It's outside my specialty. But I think they are concepts we don't need."』

『"This canary bird, in the end he was separated from his human family, he turned back into a bird and died alone. What he thought about before he died, wasn't his mother who was a bird, but his human parents. I wonder, why?"』

『"What is it."』

『"Because this bird's mother was Passeriformes Fringillidae, it was a bird right? I don't understand, why did a bird think humans were its parents?"』

『"I don't know. It seems like newborn chicks have a habit of believing the first thing they see is their biological parent, but there's no basis for that. In the first place, it's impossible for a bird to become a human being. That book must be wrong."』

『"I wonder. For some reason I'm not so sure of that. It's interesting, this book."』

『"Don't read any further. You will be thrown out if they find out. It's a concept you don't need to know."』

『"Rather than not knowing, it's more interesting to know about it."』

『"I'm fine as long as you're here with me. I don't need anything else."』

Isuka thought Ikaruga was in a weird state, and looked at her.

With her eyes gazing at the ceiling, it seemed like Ikaruga was looking somewhere far away.

『"...Isuka, this place is too small for me."』

There was longing inside of Ikaruga's pupils as she said that.

『"It's an amazing concept. I want the two of us to realize it."』

In response to the request for the restoration of the elves, Ikaruga and Isuka happily started to work on it, and were already praised in the conceptual stage.

Isuka studied only seeking to restore the elves, and undertook the research. And as for Ikaruga, she looked forward to studying something else.

All because of that picture book.

The fact that alchemists were forbidden from contacting the outside world.

They shouldn't learn feelings. Genius dies when they obtains a human heart.

Having interest in the outside, was enough to disqualify her as a Suginami.

When she was about ten years old, Ikaruga was more interested in people than research.

Alchemist taught her attitude to seek results. They didn't to teach her ethics and humanity. Just, she started to gradually lose the happy feeling every time she made something.

That's why she thought about going outside.

She wanted to go outside. She wanted to see the world. She wanted to know what kind of humans are there. Wanted to know how the scenery is there. And so on.

"Designs Child's" researcher's mind already left Ikaruga.

She could no longer stand it, and she thought of a way out.

That's right. I just need to be thrown out.

Ikaruga orchestrated it. The resurrection of elves, if it turns out to be a failure, she will be branded as trash and thrown out of Alchemist.

She will be able to get to outside world.

A year later. As Ikaruga intended, the restoration of elves resulted with failure.

By messing around with gene sequences, employing human sperm, half elves were being born. The eggs used weren't ones of a Dark Elf, but ones of Wood Elves who had astounding physical ability, but didn't possess magic. Knowing that Ikaruga continued experiments.

What Alchemist was seeking, was a magic-using weapon. And as a half, its capacity was halved as well.

Therefore, the experiment was a failure. They should have already noticed that the rapid development stopped. And even though they wasted a tremendous amount of money and time, the research ended up being a failure, the higher-ups were greatly disheartened.

With this I'll be able to go out. I'll be able to stretch my wings outside, and find even more interesting things.

She obtained the result she wanted.

Well then, let's go see the world. Let's stop being a bird in a cage, let's learn more things, let's aim at something even sharper.

With a heart full of hope, Ikaruga foresaw tomorrow.

『"——Ikaruga!"』

Just when she was packing luggage in her room,

After being suddenly called, Ikaruga raised her face. Isuka threw something at her.

Ikaruga caught it with both hands in a hurry.

That was, a baby with long ears.

The baby didn't cry, the baby was looking up at Ikaruga silently.

It appeared to be a year old. Ikaruga moved her face closer and touched, checking it.

『"What are you planning! Making half-breeds like this...!"』

Isuka was shaking in anger and moved closer to Ikaruga.

Ikaruga looked at both Isuka and the baby, she was upset.

『"T-this is, the Wood Elf I made?"』

『"I took it out of incubator in the middle of rapid growth. So you did this didn't you?! Why did you do such a thing?!"』

Even as she was being questioned by Isuka, Ikaruga stared at the baby. It was her fist time holding a child.

Because its head was bending, she needed to support it?

Not knowing why she hurried, Ikaruga embraced the baby just like it was in her picture book. When she embraced it properly, the baby laughed.

『"…………"』

It was an unknown feeling.

Something, something hot inside her chest…

『"Are you listening, Ikaruga!"』

『"Y-yeah. I made it like this on purpose. The reason was, because I want to go out to outside world."』

『"…………you."』

『"If the experiment fails, I'll be thrown out, right? Thanks to that, I'll be free."』

Ikaruga looked at Isuka's shocked face, and tilted her neck.

『"Even though your head is better than mine, what kind of stupid thing are you talking about, you…!"』

It was unusual for Isuka to show that much emotions.

Not knowing what's she talking about, Ikaruga erased any expressions on her face.

『"You might end up sharing that half-breed's fate…!"』

『"What do you mean?"』

『"Come and look for yourself."』

Isuka waved beside her neck, and rested her head after sitting on the bed.

Ikaruga wanted to let down the baby she held, but as the laughing baby touched her cheek, she wasn't able to move.

Same fate as this elf?

She learned what did that mean a few hours ago.

Just as Isuka said, Ikaruga headed to treatment facility in the lab.

Originally, it was a facility that handled dissolving the bodies of fantastical organisms that became obsolete by dissolving them.

Ikaruga sneaked into control room, and looked into the processing facility through glass window.

『"…so that's what she meant."』

There was a large amount of lab coats floating in the solution.

They were all small sized, children sizes. Name tags floated together with the coats.

The names given to Suginami's were uniform and based on birds. Heron, Parrot, Cuckoo, Kuina... It meant owners of the coats floating there, were all "Designs Children".

Of course, that's right.

Even if they were failures, they were Suginami's who held Alchemist's technology, there's no way they would throw them outside.

"Designs Children" were Alchemist's results.

That meant, for Alchemist, that Ikaruga was the same as an experimental body.

Just like Ikaruga sacrificed experimental animals until now, the people above will dispose of Ikaruga when they decide she's incompetent.

The day before she was supposed to be disposed off, Ikaruga went in front of the baby in a cage.

Probably, Ikaruga will not avoid disposal. She made a mistake that's normally impossible.

Isuka was trying to wisely trying to persuade the higher-ups, but the decision wasn't overturned.

In the end, she became a bother to Isuka, and will be killed.

But she didn't feel sad. Ikaruga still couldn't understand that feeling.

Just, she thought it's a pity. She won't be able to satisfy her curiosity any more,

What a shame.

『"............"』

She came here not knowing why herself, Ikaruga came to the crystal-covered cage.

Inside of it, there was a baby elf walking on all fours.

『"You will be killed now. Together with me."』

Ikaruga said to the baby.

『"Hey, what kind of feeling is sadness? The experimental animals, what do they think as they die?"』

Even though she asked, the baby only answered with 'aaa' and 'uuu', just that. What a boring living being. Ikaruga was about to leave that place.

That's when.

『"Ma-ma..."』

The baby uttered those words. Ikaruga's feet stopped.

After interrupting in the middle of rapid growth process, the learning should also have stopped. To remember the word mother, and even recognize Ikaruga as mother by instinct. She didn't even provide an egg, she wasn't even genetically related to it, the fact that it was Ikaruga who created it... it acknowledged that.

Mama. Mother. She read it in the book. She didn't understand it well, she just knew those words. Something in her chest tightened.

She turned her body, and glanced inside the cage with a complex expression.

The baby showed her body in front of the food inlet, and laughed merrily.

It stretched a small hand towards her.

Unexpectedly, she felt a sense of guilt.

——what have I done.

Although her feelings were still immature, a concept of sin rooted itself inside Ikaruga.

——Despite not knowing what a mother is, I became a mother.

In the end, Ikaruga was a Suginami.

She sought a result which was going out, failing on purpose, for that purpose she used materials given by Alchemist.

She wasn't worthy to be called a mother. She didn't know anything about mothers.

But that it was an incredible sin——she knew. For some reason she knew that.

"...ma-ma..."

Ikaruga reached out to the elf in the food inlet, she didn't know what to do as after she contacted it. If she's a mother, then what does she have to do? What are parents?

What can she do?

....

That's right, a name... she read it in the picture book, first, parents give a name to the child. She needs to give it a name.

Ikaruga said what came to her mind at the moment.

『"Kanaria..."』

『"Kana—...ria〜?"』

『"That's right. Kanaria. That's your name."』

It said Kanaria with a trembling voice and laughed happily.

『"Kanaria—, Kanaria〜...aa."』

Ikaruga didn't know what did she seek in Kanaria.

Just, while thinking of something, she removed the mints from her pocket, and put a hand inside of the food inlet.

Kanaria extended her small hands towards the candy.

That's when, just for a moment, Ikaruga and Kanaria touched.

A warm feeling. Ikaruga immediately withdrew her hand.

『"............!"』

『"Ma-ma?"』

Unable to withstand Kanaria's gaze who stared in wonder, Ikaruga ran away from the spot.

When she was running, she heard a cry from behind.

It was a voice calling Ikaruga.

She blocked her ears, and just ran.

She couldn't deny she did something bad.

Everything she did up until now, was her responsibility.

『"You can't sleep? Ikaruga."』

Just when she was about to go outside from her room, Isuka came out of the bed and showed her face. Ikaruga instantly hid her luggage, and glanced at Isuka.

Isuka silently stared at Ikaruga in response, and said expressionlessly.

『"It's alright. I tried my best to make sure they didn't dispose of you. The higher-ups are not as stupid as to dispose of someone as talented as you are."』

『"............"』

『"You are my other half. I need you, and you need me. Right?"』

Ikaruga chewed her lower lip in response.

And she stretched her hand to Isuka who was lying down.

『"Hey, Isuka... will you run away from here together with me?"』

『"...w-why do we have to do something like that?"』

『"It's alright. I've planned this properly. Leave it to me."』

『"...why run away? Do you want to live in outside world?"』

『"There's that... but the main reason is, that this place is... wrong."』

『"What have you been talking about for a while now...? The one who is wrong is you, right? Doing such... like failing on purpose... I have no intention of running away from here!"』

Isuka distanced herself from Ikaruga.

Ikaruga kept reaching out to Isuka with a serious expression.

『"If we stay here, we will wither. I am sick of this bird cage already. I want to get out, think what I want, live as I like."』

『"It's alright if we just stay here! In here we can research as much as we want, and there's no discomfort at all! What are you complaining about?!"』

『"............Isuka, you still don't know. But surely, one day you will."』

『"Shut up! You don't understand me! Even though I put so much effort to save you, why are you separating yourself from me?!"』

『"That's not it, I——"』

The moment she was about to say that, suddenly sirens rang from the room's speakers.

Then, there was an emergency announcement.

Hearing it, Isuka made a questioning look.

『"The Lost Matrix was stolen? Impossible, authentication for the vault——"』

Isuka glared at Ikaruga.

『"Ikaruga, it can't be, you."』

Obviously hostile, Isuka hit Ikaruga's hand away.

『"...don't touch me, I won't save you any more... that was stupid."』

『"............"』

Ikaruga stared at the hand that was hit, stunned.

She slowly turned towards the door, and looked at Isuka only once more.

『"I'm sorry——bye bye, Isuka."』

Ikaruga told her these words of farewell, and ran away just like that by fleeing through the hallway.

Among the ringing sirens, Ikaruga ran away breathlessly.

For a time like this she prepared a way out of the laboratory, but she didn't anticipate such a commotion.

It was probably because she took the Lost Matrix.

The reason she stole it, was because she had felt horrible. She wanted to do something to atone, when she touched Kanaria she was perpetrated by the feeling that said 'you've done something unforgivable'.

When she thought about that she felt sorry again.

『"Haa... haa.."』

While hiding in the shadows, Ikaruga rushed to her target location.

After making sure there was no one in there, they were the cages fantastical creatures were held in.

Kanaria called for her mother, Ikaruga.

For the sake of convenience, Ikaruga became Kanaria's mother.

It was written in the picture book. That parents protect their children.

That's why wanting to protect her was normal. Protecting her, was responsibility of the one who created her. She wasn't convinced completely, but she shouldn't have been killed yet, she should be still here in 'clean'.

That's why, Ikaruga decided to bring Kanaria with her.

It was lonely without Isuka, but at least she can finally escape from the prison, to the outside world.

Even if she fails escaping, that's better than staying here.

『"Kana...ria...?"』

But, the prison Kanaria was supposed to be in, it was already empty.

『"............That's............wha."』

She stuck her hand inside the crystal, but she couldn't find anything.

Looking closely, by the end of the prison, there was the mint candy she gave her.

She was too late.

Waking up to the guilt. Learning ethics. The regret. Everything, was too late.

It was the same in the picture book. No, Even worse than in it. The canary in the picture book was able to spend happy days with its parents, even if they were fake. But Ikaruga's Kanaria died without knowing anything, and alone.

This ending was too unreasonable, Ikaruga could understand enough now.

She recalled how on the cover illustration they held hands with a smile. And she tasted a tremendous sense of loss.

Definitely, she yearned for that.

Laughing happily, like the people in the picture book.

And die happy, like the canary in the picture book.

Right from the beginning, happiness spilled out from her hand, Ikaruga submerged herself in regret.

『"............"』

She hit the wall once while chewing her lower lip, and ran away shaking everything off.

Ikaruga couldn't explain what feelings she held in her chest.

While feeling like she wanted to cry, she followed the escape route.

Isuka's words passed through her head, what a canary feels.

She left those two, and ran away.

Without knowing anything, she discarded those two who had nothing, and she was the only one free. In a new world, she decided to look for her new self.

Ikaruga threw all of it away.

Forgot everything. She blocked her ears, to live only thinking of herself. Then, Ikaruga took off to the outside world.

She spread out her newborn emotions.

* * *

"...with this, you know everything about me."

While snuggling beside Takeru, Ikaruga told him everything.

She spoke with an indifferent tone, as if she didn't have any emotions.

Takeru also didn't show any reactions, he just listened in silence.

"For the sake of escaping from that place, I made half elves. I've toyed with life. Well, it wasn't just elves. There was some variation before that."

She acted as if there was nothing wrong with it, and she saw Takeru made a difficult face.

"I enrolled in the academy, because I didn't want to give them the Lost Matrix. Even Alchemist wouldn't dare to enter the Inquisition's base."

Hearing that, he was convinced. So that's why Ikaruga never left the academy, that was the reason.

"...it was first time I've heard you talk about yourself."

Takeru said quietly.

Ikaruga raised herself and opened one eye.

"You didn't ask. Even if you asked I wouldn't tell you though.

"I guess.

"I knew a lot about you, I even thought it was unfair too, you know?"

Takeru shook his head in response.

Ikaruga supported her cheek with the palm of her hand and stared at Takeru.

"Well, with this you know now, right? What kind of human I am. About the humans known as Suginami."

"............"

"Ever since long time ago, I live for myself, I do what I want to do. Nothing has changed."

What Ikaruga said didn't seem like a lie.

"Things like guilt, atonement... truth to be told, I don't understand them. I wasn't taught it you know. I took away the Lost Matrix because I mimicked the ethics from the picture book, surely."

Ikaruga acted masochistic towards herself, an artificial existence.

However, Takeru couldn't help but object. It was absolutely impossible that she didn't feel guilty.

"So what, you came to a place like this all alone.

"............"

"If alchemists tried to restore the Dark Elves again, why did you want to make a deal using Lost Matrix?"

"............"

"...what was your real objective?"

As Takeru questioned her, Ikaruga made a wry smile.

"I, unlike like Kusanagi, don't try struggle to change for better. I didn't come here with any admirable goal. I didn't come here for someone's sake, I came here for myself."

"Don't dodge the question. I want to know what did you come here to do."

"And what will you do if you know that?"

"Help you."

"And what if it's something bad?"

"Then stop you with all my strength."

Even if he wanted to learn more details from her, he would fail. It would just repeat.

"Hmm. You, treating me the same as you did with Ootori and Nikaido, even though it's me."

"...you're same, right. You're one of my comrades."

"But I, am not satisfied with being the same. Equality is no good, being on top is fine. Because I want to be on the very top."

Ikaruga suddenly approached Takeru's face.

Her body and face were right next to his, it was breathtaking.

"Hey, a while ago, I've told you I like you right? Why don't I teach you the reason."

"...what, all of a sudden."

"The old Kusanagi was similar to me. That's why I was comfortable being together with you. Still mentally immature, comrades lacking proper emotions, we met together in that shelter. You understand what that means?"

"............?"

"Even though that was my ulterior motive, I was relieved when I was by your side. For me, Kusanagi was a cornerstone in the outside world."

Takeru was sure, that Ikaruga acted just like she always did.

However, her expression remained the same as always, her eyes didn't indicate a lie, nor it did a smile.

"But Kusanagi has changed. Because of Ootori."

"...it's not really her fault. I just used the fact that I lost to her as opportunity..."

"Is that so? Well, I'm fine with either."

She placed a hand on Takeru's chest, and her face approached him further.

She moved her big breasts, turning around and she clung to Takeru's arm.

"F-for a while now you are somewhat close? My body is already warmed up, what is this situation..."

"Hey, about Ootori, do you like her?"

"Why did a serious talk turn into that?!"

"This is serious talk."

Being stared at with glossy eyes, Takeru stiffened.

"I hate Ootori. I don't mean her as a human. She is a bit naive, but serious and likeable. I like people like her. But not as much as I like Usagi."

"Yy-you, ww-what are you."

"But I hate her. Do you know why?"

Being questioned, Takeru looked away and wondered about it.

He didn't know. Being told that suddenly like that, there's no way he would know. In the first place, what kind of situation was this? It's not time for this, right? Even though Ootori and the others were captured.

But he couldn't face the reality now, it would be rude, and above all he didn't want to.

He wondered about it endlessly, but didn't find a reason.

Ikaruga's sweet scent that felt slightly like mint tickled his nose, his consciousness turned unsteady.

Suddenly, Ikaruga rose up, and mounted Takeru.

"Wh-wha-what are you doing?!?!"

"As you can see, right?"

"I don't get itt!!"

"No, it might be the end, so I thought I might put an effort to experience it."

"Experience what?!"

"Sex."

"?!?!?!?!?!?!"

Takeru's body was stiff like stone, shivers ran through him.

What is this person doing.

He repeated in his mind like a small baby.

"I don't really know much about things like love, but I know just a little about sex. I'm interested."

"I-if you don't know then don't get horny!"

Even though he retorted, Ikaruga unhooked her bra.

Two big bulges bounced like balls in front of his eyes.

Takeru instinctively covered his eyes with a hand.

"Horny, that's rude. It's my first time after all, it's not like anyone is fine you know? I thought if its Kusanagi, it would be okay. That kind of feeling?"

"That's being horny!"

"Don't babble, if you're a man then embrace me already. You're a virgin, right?"

"Vv-v-virg... that has nothing to do with it?!"

"I am a virgin as well. Good for you."

"Good or bad, that's not the problem!"

"Or maybe you don't want to embrace me? Am I not attractive?"

She tilted her neck slightly, and asked with a straight fight. She was slightly anxious, or rather she felt a bit afraid, fearful.

With such expression on her face... that question was unfair.

"Eh, no, um, that's... umm."

"Bufuu. You're embarrassed."

"You're teasing me after all?! Or are you serious, which is it?!"

Instinctively he responded like normal. Takeru's heart was more delicate than expected.

However,

"Sorry, I'm not teasing you. I'm serious, that's why I..."

When he heard from Ikaruga she was serious, he was puzzled once again.

"I'm making fun of you because I'm nervous."

Nervous? Ikaruga was Nervous?

Unable to believe those words, Takeru stared intently at Ikaruga's body.

"Then... what do we do? Hug and see?"

She averted her eyes and asked with confidence. She was beautiful, that's what he thought. As a man, he couldn't deny it.

Between wanting to embrace her, and not. It was obvious he wanted to do it.

But, just like Ikaruga said about herself, Takeru didn't know what love is either. Even though he was fond of Ikaruga, he never looked at her this way before.

Is it alright to embrace her in a situation like this?

Takeru was very calm, and he suddenly remembered Ikaruga's words.

——It might be the end.

That's what Ikaruga said when she straddled him.

...what did she mean?

The moment Takeru thought about that, the relaxed atmosphere was blown away.

He suddenly heard a shrill sound from the distance. It was sound of helicopters rotor.

It was followed with lights entering the window, Takeru covered his eyes from it.

"Alchemist...?!"

"...oh, thirty minutes ahead of the schedule. She's impatient, that Isuka."

While riding on top of Takeru, she looked at the shadow of the machine on the other side of the glass window.

"Unfortunately, my first time is postponed. I might not have another chance, so I wanted to be done with it."

While still naked, she fixed her hair with both of her hands, and closed on Takeru's face.

"I was the one who called them here. This is where you and I separate, Kusanagi."

"...ha?"

"I've told you right, that it might be the end."

Ikaruga grinned and suddenly,

She overlapped her lips with Takeru's.

The kiss was just a light touch, but Takeru stopped thinking, his eyes were wide open.

It only lasted for a moment. But the soft sensation firmly burned itself into Takeru's brain.

When their lips separated, Ikaruga stuck her tongue out and laughed mischievously.

"Thanks for the meal."

"…………"

"For us who have no experience this much is fine."

"…Ika…ruga?"

"I like you, Takeru. A bit more than I like Usagi."

Ikaruga put a hand on his neck, and turned it around, she stared at him lovingly.

Right after that——he felt a bit of pain on his neck.

Surprised by the pain he looked at Ikaruga, she had something.

That's, a syringe?

Before he noticed, he could no longer move. No matter how much power he put in, his muscles only trembled.

"Y…ou, what… did you do…"

"It's just a neurotoxin. You'll be able to move soon."

Ikaruga stood up, wore the clothes placed on the sofa and lifted the bag.

"I am going to destroy the fifth laboratory now."

"…you… what are you saying?"

"I'm not like Kusanagi, but even I have some regret left in me. In order to get rid of it, I am going to destroy that place."

"…………khh."

"If you guys didn't come it would have already been done… but it was just a detour."

Takeru couldn't believe it, he was astonished.

Ikaruga went up to the door, and looked back at Takeru.

"I won't let Kusanagi to carry it. This is my problem."

"............you, can't do... such a thing... alone...!"

"You know already. If I say I'll do it then I will, I'm a capable woman aren't I?"

Ikaruga opened the door.

"I wrote where Ootori and the others will be released on a memo, and put it in your clothes. Go back to school together with those girls."

"...y...ou..."

"Don't get any more involved in this matter. I'm the cause of it, and I don't want to involve you any further."

"...wait——"

"Bye, bye. Takeru."

In the end she called him by first name, then closed the door.

She went out of the hotel, in front of it stood a dark red woman, Suginami Isuka.

Ikaruga squinted, and stopped in front of her while laughing though her nose.

"Isn't this a lot faster than promised? It's too late for a date so it's NG, don't you think its too early?"

"Arriving before anyone else is in Suginami's nature. The one who should be here first is you."

The two of them stared at each other expressionlessly.

"You turned really bossy, Isuka. You were much cuter in the past."

"You're exactly same as before, Ikaruga. Just like when you betrayed me."

Immediately after Isuka returned those words to Ikaruga, from the transport helicopter hovering in the air, four new Dragoon's dropped down on parachutes, and crushed the asphalt as they landed.

There were also snipers waiting in the helicopter, their scopes reflected the light.

"That's really exaggerated. This much for one weak girl?"

"Weak? Who are you talking about? What are you talking about this late into the game. You're someone equipped with grief."

"You say that even though you don't understand grief."

"Same to you."

Ikaruga got tired of restraining herself, and spat out sigh.

"...the promise, you're going to fulfill it right?"

"As soon as you——"

"Isuka."

rinn... a bell-like voice sounded, and the air shook.

Isuka stared at Ikaruga.

While her hair danced in the wind, Ikaruga caught a glimpse of Isuka's black pupils.

"If you break your promise, I'll dedicate my entire existence into bullying you. I'll have you taste endless hell until your life is exhausted."

At that time, Ikaruga didn't flinch even with Dragoon's surrounding her.

Isuka was unfazed. Unfazed, she narrowed her eyes.

"...don't worry. I have already released the hostages. Also, it's fine if you come with us together with Lost Matrix. Inquisition is preparing the troops... soon the laboratory will be under attack. Hurry up."

"That white haired bastard moved really fast... can it be that you were forsaken by the Alchemist?"

"In the end, Alchemist is just a company. I have almost fulfilled my objective. So it doesn't matter."

"Ah, that's right. As long as we finish the experiment on elves it's all good. Well then, let's go."

Ikaruga said that and tried to board the small helicopter that landed in the alley.

"——wait."

In the doorway of the wasted hotel, there stood a boy.

Although he still had handcuffs attached to his left wrist, the chain has been torn off.

He escaped by force, blood was dripping from his wrist.

Ikaruga didn't look back, and Isuka looked towards him with much interest. The surrounding Dragoon's were also wary of him.

"...I won't let you go."

"............"

"Captain's order. Don't go."

Ikaruga didn't turn around. Takeru was standing there holding a sword, he forced his uncooperative body to move, and his pupils were dyed red.

The brunt of his anger, was directed at Ikaruga.

"You're not suited for self-sacrifice If you're going, take me with you."

"............"

"I definitely won't let you go alone."

He poised his sword, and let out a strong fighting spirit.

Sensing hostility, the four Dragoons prepared for battle.

《"What should we do?"》

"Fight back. We don't have time to be bothered."

Isuka instructed the Dragoon pilots and boarded the helicopter.

With a slight delay, Ikaruga followed her.

"Didn't you hear I told you to wait?!"

At the same time, Takeru started running, and one of Dragoons moved.

《"This guy is insane, he goes against a Dragoon with a sword!"》

The Pilot underestimated him completely, and instead of using the heavy rifle which was the standard equipment, he tried to slam him with an arm.

A gigantic figure raised its arms in front of him.

He was almost stunned by the pain in his back, but he remained calm.

He was furious——and calm.

"Make way."

He poised his sword above him, and put it on collision course with enemy's attack.

And the newest model of Dragoon's arm soared into the sky together with a high-pitched sound.

《"Wha——"》

It was an impossible scene. Even lightweight Dragoon's had a considerable amount of armour. It was impossible for a flesh and blood human to cut it with a sword.

His body wasn't strengthened by Relic Eater.

It was Soumatou mixed with all his heart and soul and using the "cut to the hand".

The Dragoon lost its arm and unable to kill the momentum of its attack, it slammed into the wall.

As the cloud of dust raised in his background, Takeru was in state of relaxed alertness.

He exhaled deeply, and calmed himself in order to soothe the convulsing muscles.

When he was young, he was taught what he should do when he's been poisoned.

The pilots of the Dragoons recognized Takeru as a threat.

Takeru raised his spirit to the maximum, and rushed towards the helicopter to catch Ikaruga.

He triggered Soumatou and kicked off the ground.

However, immediately after that, an attack came from the sky.

pashoon, a dry sound rang out.

"——!!"

The shoulder of Takeru who was trying to jump was hit by a sniper, and another sniper was in the sky prepared to shoot. His movements and senses were enhanced by Soumatou, his operation range was narrow. But if he were to expand it, the burden on the brain would get too big.

The snipers were far in the sky. But he couldn't reach them there.

After Takeru's left shoulder was pierced, he nearly fell down forward to the ground.

On top of that, one of the Dragoons swung its arm at him.

"Gahaa——!"

Takeru's body was lifted up, then he fell down to the ground.

The Dragoon aimed the muzzle of its rifle at Takeru who was out of breath.

That's when.

"Hey."

zowari...chills ran down the pilot's spine.

There was something behind him. The pilot turned the machine around cautiously, and behind he saw her.

It was Ikaruga.

She looked towards the Dragoon with eyes that looked like entrance to abyss, she stood there expressionless.

"——Don't get ahead of yourself, underling. I'll kill you."

What was in front of the pilot, didn't seem like a girl.

No, for a moment, she didn't look like a human.

As if she was a dreadful monster, that's what the pilot thought.

"That's different from what was promised."

Ikaruga warned Isuka who had her back turned away.

Isuka raised her hair, and observed Takeru.

"He won't die with just that much. Even so, he's an interesting material, isn't he. He accelerates brain processing speed... Collect it and——"

"I won't give it to you. It's mine. I told you, if you touch him I won't forgive you."

Ikaruga warned Isuka with a threatening tone of voice and looked back.

Isuka changed her attitude, and gave Ikaruga a questioning look.

Once again, Ikaruga headed to the helicopter.

She didn't look back until she boarded it.

And took off to the sky without even glancing at Takeru.

"Ku......that...stubborn......"

Takeru was lying on his back, and he cursed as his consciousness faded.

* * *

Inside the dim interior of a car, Ouka's wariness almost exploded until finally light entered her narrowed eyes.

"Go!"

She was kicked in the back, towards the light.

After she hit the ground, she groaned with pain. Groans could also be heard from behind her.

After looking back in the light, she saw Usagi and Mari lying the same way.

There was a loud bang from the black car they were riding, and after the engine sounded it drove away.

"Are you guys alright?"

"S-somewhat... just scrapped my knee."

Mari answered while rubbing her knee, Usagi didn't answer as she raised her body.

"Those guys, why did they set us free...? We're from Inquisition, we're obviously their enemies."

Ouka murmured while looking puzzled in the direction the car drove off to.

A while earlier, Ouka and the others were given uniforms and then taken here by the car.

"Come to think of it, she told us we're bargaining chips..."

Ouka remembered Isuka's words as well.

Exchange? Is it with Inquisition?

Ouka didn't even consider that they were alive thanks to the Inquisition.

She had to at least report Alchemist' actions to Inquisition no matter what.

That they were plotting to restore the elves.

There's was disadvantages in doing that.

"...what's happening..."

She narrowed her eyes, Alchemist's fifth weapons development laboratory's tower was visible in the distance.

The gray city almost had no power supply, so it was almost completely dark during the night.

Only fifth laboratory was visible.

Ouka couldn't help but see in that light a prelude to something that was about to happen.

When she felt that in her chest, Usagi who was silent stood up completely. Same as Ouka, the direction she was staring at, was fifth laboratory.

"Saionji?"

As Ouka spoke, Usagi started to silently walk towards the laboratory.

"Where are you going?"

"...I'm going back there, in that place. Suginami is definitely there."

Usagi continued with her back turned to Ouka.

"The one who got us out, was Suginami."

"...how do you know that."

"I just know, that woman knew we will get caught, and requested an exchange for the Lost Matrix. I, I need to go and save her."

Ouka rushed towards Usagi who started walking to stop her.

"Wait Saionji. When you heard that woman's story, what did you think about it?"

When Mari heard Ouka's question, she made a face that seemed to say 'hey, hey'. And say that she can't read the mood, but it was important for Ouka to know it.

Isuka honestly told the three girls about the outrageous experiments they were carrying out. They wanted to hide from the truth, and but they couldn't say anything in response. They learned about the atrocities Ikaruga did once in the fifth laboratory.

Therefore, she needed to hear it.

Whether she believed in Ikaruga who did so many misdeeds.

"...why are you asking me something like that."

"I learned how Suginami was in the past. But, I don't know the current Suginami."

"............"

"That's why I want to hear what Saionji thinks. Because you had a long relation with her, I think there's merit in what you decide to do."

"Do you intend to pull everything out of me?"

"I just want to know your resolution."

"............"

"Saionji, do you believe in Suginami?

Ouka asked a serious question.

Usagi turned away, her shoulders strongly trembled, she hugged herself strongly.

"Whether I believe... or not... I don't care about that. No matter what Suginami's past is, I am not interested. I'm fine with Suginami as she is right now."

Her slightly trembling voice firmly reached the other two.

Usagi's tears moistened the ground.

"If Suginami is involved in something dangerous, I will go and save her."

"............"

"If Suginami is doing something bad, then I will slap her."

"…………"

"In either case, Suginami has to be by my side…"

She spoke in a tearful voice, and supported herself by embracing her own shoulders.

Hard-heartedly she raised her head, and faced forward.

"I want to protect the 35th Test Platoon."

Usagi told them her true feelings.

"It might not be outstanding, but for me the 35th Test Platoon is… where I belong. There's no other place for me other than 35th platoon. I'm sure it's the same for Suginami and Kusanagi. If even one person is missing from it, we will lose the place we belong to."

"…………"

"That's why, I will definitely protect it. Just that place… I will definitely protect."

Hearing that, Ouka quietly frowned.

She remembered the words Takeru said when she first enlisted.

When she was still unfamiliar with other members, when she asked Takeru, he briefly told her characteristics of Usagi, and he also added this.

『"Among all our members, I think Usagi is the one who cherishes the platoon the most. Somehow she seems to be the one who thinks about her comrades the most."』

An underachiever and a dunce. She always sought to shelter herself from the crowd, she was unlike the others, but there were times where she felt a connection.

Ouka was envious of Usagi. Ten months has passed ever since the platoon was formed, they had senior bonds.

To the three others, Ouka didn't share a bond with them yet.

She didn't know just how much Usagi loved the platoon. That's because, until Ouka enlisted there were only the three of them.

What's this… subtle pain in my chest.

In order to understand that emotion as loneliness, Ouka still didn't grow enough emotionally.

However, Usagi's feelings reached her.

"I see. Your resolve, it has definitely reached me."

Ouka nodded strongly, Mari came closer while holding her arms behind her head.

"Really, it can't be helped. I'll go along with Usagi-chan. I still owe you guys."

Mari raised her hands over her head while saying "good grief" and smiled bitterly.

Ouka and Usagi stared at Mari with deadpan expressions.

""…………""

"I the Witch of Aurora will lend you my power, you guys better be gratef——"

""What can a witch who can't use magic do?""

After having that pointed out by the two, Mari fell down to her knees frustrated.

Ouka changed plan, placed a hand on Usagi's shoulder and conveyed her own decision.

"Saionji, I will lend you all my strength. I will risk my life for your resolve."

"Re-really?"

"——Hey, heeey! I want to complain about the difference in treatment!"

Mari meddled in with tears in her eyes, joining the two.

"Ootori, do you believe in that story about Suginami?"

The story she heard from Isuka, it shouldn't be acceptable for Ouka who hated criminals to the bone.

Designs Children, recreation of elves and other experiments on organisms, Ikaruga was involved with them. If she really intended to give the Lost Matrix to Isuka, should that really be true she would be outraged.

"No, it's my principle to make decision after I know the truth. I won't believe until I see it with my own eyes or hear it from Suginami herself, it's all put on hold."

She spoke stiffly as always, but it couldn't be helped since that was how Ouka was.

"For that sake, I need to meet Suginami."

Ouka placed hands on her hips, and puffed her chest.

Rather than heading towards the laboratory now, there was another problem of what had to be taken care off as a priority.

There wasn't much time. There was no other choice but to enter the institute with just their platoon, contacting Inquisition has to be delayed. Inquisition to prevent the restoration of the elves by themselves. Their own priority was the rescue of Ikaruga, leaving prevention of the experiment to Inquisition was reasonable.

If it is as Usagi said, and Ikaruga made an exchange to release the hostages, if Takeru was also caught, he should have been released.

It might have been wishful thinking, but they needed to contact with Takeru first. That meant, they needed to secure a way of contacting him.

Just when Ouka thought that with a difficult look on her face.

Ouka noticed that the ground she was standing shook slightly.

"...what?"

Pebbles lying on the ground were rolling and making rattling noise.

As the shaking increased and approached her location, she saw something at the main avenue.

Immediately after, from the behind the corner, countless Dragoons jumped out.

"E-enemy?"

"No... look at the shoulder."

A pentagram on top of a cross was drawn on one of the Dragoons.

They were Dragoons owned by Inquisition Board.

The number increased steadily, and a terrible momentum passed by Ouka and the others.

In addition to the Dragoons, there were people who looked like members of Spriggan riding four-wheelers at breakneck speed.

"This number... it's at least a battalion."

In the middle of the rising cloud of dust, Ouka was dumbfounded as multi-layered waves of Spriggans passed by her.

They were unexpected reinforcements. Although she was thankful for them, with this much strength it seemed like they were going to war.

On the very end, there was an out-of-place white limousine lazily moving forward.

Limousine stopped in front of Ouka, and the windows opened quietly.

"——Oh ho, what are you doing here guys! It's dangerous for three girls like you to visit such a place! I don't remember issuing you a permit?!"

A dubious man dressed in white appeared, it was Sougetsu.

Sougetsu exaggeratedly feigned surprise, and smiled towards the three girls.

The three of them gave him a look that said they despise him from bottom of their hearts.

"...what the hell is this."

"——Can't you see? We're going to war."

Sougetsu straightforwardly replied, Ouka's face displayed tension.

"In fact, we found out that the fifth laboratory is performing illegal experiments. We're heading to raid them now."

Since he told Ouka before that it was 『War』, it was too late to call it a raid.

"If Chairman himself has sortied, that means things are not looking good."

"If the boss comes as well the morale will be better, right?"

Even hearing Ouka's sarcasm, he poked the window while grinning.

Ouka felt more and more unpleasant.

"...did captain Kurogane acknowledge this raid?"

"Right now, he is writing a mountain of written apologies. If his men didn't fail the mission, there wouldn't be this pointless battle. He took responsibility."

Ouka thought that if Kurogane Hayato was involved in this matter, he would stop them from using this much force.

If they move as a military like this, it gives the enemy a sense of crisis.

Knowing that this much force was used to eliminate the fifth laboratory, the enemy forces will move to headquarters. If that happens, a war will occur.

Hayato's way was one that tried to minimize amount of lives lost. He would try to avoid collision between the Alchemist and Inquisition.

"...Chairman, do you really intend to go to war with Alchemist? If something like that happens, the innocent citizens will——"

"Don't misunderstand. I've spoken with Alchemist headquarters. It seems to have been fifth laboratory's arbitrary decision, they're taking part in suppression."

"Headquarters...? Chairman, do you believe them?"

"We move because we have their permission, it's too late to pull out now anyway right? I made the decision after learning the truth."

Ouka thought to herself while admitting defeat, that this man was sickening.

The enemy is just the fifth laboratory. Even if someone gets involved, it'll be just the criminals from the gray city. There is no way of the public making a fuss because of it. Also, no matter how much I want to declare war on their headquarters, there's no benefits coming from it, hahahaha!"

Although he was laughing cheerfully, it didn't reach his eyes.

However, if they have an agreement with the Alchemist's top, then problem with the fighting force was resolved. Like this, dominating the fifth laboratory will be completed without starting a war.

She wasn't convinced about not involving people from the border, however people in vicinity of the area are accustomed to carnage. If they see this many Inquisitors, they would have ran away already sensing the crisis.

"Rather than that, I asked before, what are you guys doing in the border? This is no good, you shouldn't perform investigations in the border."

Even though you agitated us to do it, what are you talking about now... is what she thought, but she stayed silent.

"I wonder, what's happening with Kusanagi-kun and Suginami-kun?"

Ouka wondered if she should tell him about Ikaruga. She should check it with her own eyes and ears before she reports to Sougetsu, if the truth isn't revealed there's a high chance she might be arrested.

Ouka absolutely couldn't forgive that.

Probably the one who sent them letter saying that Ikaruga was a traitor was Sougetsu. She vaguely suspected that from the beginning, but she didn't think he would send a letter like that for no reason.

He was even convinced about the experiments on elves, that was probably because Ikaruga was tailed. Sougetsu continued to grin like a Cheshire cat.

Ouka hated that grin.

She hated his secretiveness as well.

"No idea. We just lost our way."

But before she learned the truth, betraying her comrade would be even worse.

"Can't you contact him through radio?"

He said that, and encouraged a passenger who was riding together with him to pass his intercoms. Ouka caught the intercom that was thrown at her by the passenger, and attached it to her ear.

"Should we help you look for them?"

"It's fine. It was our fault in the first place, we'll be fine looking for them alone."

"But if it turns into battle you might get dragged into it?"

"It will be a good experience. Can we borrow some weapons?"

Sougetsu's mouth distorted displaying joy.

"You can borrow what you like from the vehicles in the rear. I also strip the restriction for Relic Eater usage since it's an emergency. Use it well."

"............"

"That's to save Suginami-kun, right?"

Because of his attitude that said he saw through all of it, Ouka felt like murdering Sougetsu.

Ouka bowed apologizing, and she returned to her comrades after turning on her heel.

"No time to stand here. Let's go... we need to recover Suginami before Inquisition conquers the laboratory."

Ouka told the two and closed her eyes.

It was an emergency, one of their comrades was in danger, she spread both of her hands.

That moment, a crimson magical circle spread under her feet.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

Usagi and Suginami were startled not knowing what's happening, but there wasn't time to worry about that.

Ouka, in order to save her comrade, sought assistance from the existence she hated the most.

"——Malleus Maleficarum."

With a reluctant tone of voice, discarding everything, she called out to the heresy.

Sougetsu laughed while covering his mouth with his hand, but it leaked out.

"Wonderful, that's essence of being comrades. Really, they're very useful, those children."

Sougetsu's amused laughter increased in volume, the other passengers showed various reactions.

Driver aside, there were three passengers inside.

They were wearing Dullahans black uniforms, they all had their chests decorated with headless knights.

They were members of AntiMagic Academy's investigator's section 1, Zeroth Extermination Riot Police, the "EXE".

"Chairman is such a bad person. Wasn't there a less roundabout way to do that?"

A member with appearance of a boy said that while combining his arms behind his head.

"If you wanted to have them fight as a vanguard, you could have just ordered them to."

"You're so silly, that would make me look like I'm a bad guy."

"...ha ha, this late in the game everyone thinks about themselves, there's no way they'll save her."

Chairman's the best, said the boy and laughed sardonically.

The other two was a giant man who remained silent, and a woman with red hair who murmured to herself while biting her nails.

Sougetsu looked at them and shook his head while saying "good grief".

"For your information, this is an action necessary for triumph of the human race. We're going to make those villains cry."

"I think the awakening of the Twilight Type will lead to the victory of the human race... right, is that still sleeping?"

Hearing the two of them, Sougetsu brushed his hair away.

"If we try to awaken it by force, it will turn into the second coming of the situation from 150 years ago. Proceeding with slow and careful erosion is an appropriate awakening for Mistletoe."

"Honestly, which one holds more importance, the case of the Alchemist, or the awakening of the Twilight Type?"

In response to the boy's question, Sougetsu looked through the window outside.

The sky of the cloudy gray city, was beginning to shed tears as if implying a grim future.

"Both of them of course, right."

In the shadow, Sougetsu's narrowed eyes shined as he looked at the moon.

Chapter 4 - Trampling Demon God

『"Don't make fun of the sword!"』

Four years earlier, Kusanagi Takeru who has been admitted to AntiMagic Academy shouted that when he was given a hard time by the other students.

Ikaruga stared at Takeru who stood at the center of the venue and around whom students gathered.

A sword was hanging by his waist, an anachronistically dressed boy. With his appearance he obviously stood out, but it strangely burned itself into her head.

Of course, after that it was the pattern where he was called out by ten people. The overwhelming number of enemies there originally was, couldn't have been overcome.

But Takeru,

『"I won't lose to anyone! Be it guns or magic, I'll cut through all of it!"』

He puffed his chest proudly and declared, provoking them 'come and get it'.

A while later.

Takeru went back to school all beat up, and sprawled out.

During the fight, he didn't draw the sword even once.

『"The sword, why didn't you pull it out?"』

Asked Ikaruga who was watching everything from the window located at the second floor of school building.

『"Ha? Who the hell are ya?"』

『"Just an onlooker. Hey, why didn't you pull it out?"』

Ikaruga suddenly spoke to him in an over familiar manner, in response, Takeru snorted in disgust while not even trying to hide his hostility.

『"I didn't lose my pride to the point of drawing a sword against unarmed opponents."』

『"Hmm. What a weird pride."』

『"No matter how much they harass me. If I throw away my pride and my sword, I won't be myself anymore. It couldn't have been helped right from the start... is it so bad to cling to it?"』

『"How desperate."』

『"Is it bad to be desperate? Is it really that bad?"』

『"That pride, is it really something that noble to make you cling to it?"』

『"...laugh if you want. I won't change no matter what they say to me."』

With a face covered by blue bruises, Takeru glared at Ikaruga.

And then Ikaruga, just as she has been told to, she laughed happily.

『"You're really interesting. I like you. I like sharp people."』

『"What's that... also, who the hell are you?"』

『"Nn? Before you ask someone for their name, you should give yours first right?"』

『"...you're pissing me off."』

As he said she's pissing him off, Ikaruga laughed even more happy causing Takeru to glare at her madly.

『"...it's Kusanagi Takeru. I came here to become an Inquisitor and change the world."』

『"Suginami Ikaruga. I came to this school to sing a song of youth."』

Before the Small Fry Platoon came to be.

They met while both of them were still lonely.

* * *

"————"

As the cold rain fell, Takeru lied on his back and his consciousness remained between dream and reality.

Although the poison already left his body, the scratches Ikaruga treated have opened, and the fracture was also pretty serious. Even his head, was still wandering in the world of memories.

The encounter with Ikaruga, was an invaluable experience for Takeru.

Takeru grew up in special environment, in seclusion, those whom he could call his friends aside, he didn't even have many opportunities to talk with other people.

Speaking to him without any hostility, Ikaruga was the first to do that. He wasn't grateful for it back then. But now, he was grateful to her for talking to him back then.

If not for Ikaruga, he wouldn't have met his current comrades. And thus a group misfits like them, wouldn't have joined forces.

Takeru put some strength in his muscles.

"...are we really that...unreliable..."

Takeru tried to stand up, but he had quite a few ribs broken. As expected, it couldn't have been helped after being hit by a Dragoon's uppercut. Together with his bleeding shoulder, it caused his consciousness to fade.

splshh

A watery sound reached him from nearby, Takeru opened his eyes and looked towards the source of it.

Standing there, completely wet because of the rain was Lapis.

"Host, the permission to use Relic Eater was received from Ootori Sougetsu. Shall we?"

Lapis mentioned it indifferently, and Takeru stared at her in return.

"I, I want to save my comrade."

"............"

"Restoration of elves, Alchemist, things like that are too difficult for me and I'm not interested in them. Even the truth about her being Designs Child, it doesn't matter."

"............"

"But, if Suginami hates it all, I will crush it with all my strength."

"............"

"Your power is necessary... come with me, Lapis."

Lapis didn't answer.

She just reached out to Takeru quietly.

"You don't need to get a permission from me. I will protect you. You are my everything."

"............"

"You belong to me, and I belong to you. I am not interested in what you desire. As long as I dwell within you, I will use all my power to fulfill your wishes."

"............"

"After all, I am your sword."

Her outstretched hand seemed cold.

Ouka said that a Relic Eater is not an ally.

But for now, that was fine.

That's who swords originally are. They exist in order to kill, they exist to be used.

It would be weird if he refused it.

Takeru took Lapis' hand.

As expected, her hand was as cold as a blade.

"——Orders, Host."

Takeru stood up, and the pain roused his consciousness, he glared at the fifth laboratory's tower.

"We're going to crush the laboratory. Let's subjugate them, Lapis."

And with his beaten up body, he held out a hand in front of himself.

"Summis desiderantes affectibus——"

He shook his extended hand as if cutting something.

"——Malleus Maleficarum!"

An azure magic circle appeared beneath his feet.

While clad in light particles, as if she was to hug Takeru from behind, she broke down into particles.

And, at the same time as the magical circle beneath his feet shattered,

Takeru's figure turned into that of a knight in azure armor.

《"Now——let's trample over them."》

Clad in azure particles, Takeru started walking.

His goal was, Alchemist's fifth weapons development laboratory.

To prevent the restoration of the elves and in order to save his comrade, the demon will subjugate them.

Around fifth laboratory outer wall, there were already several hundred Dragoons waiting.

In response to the news of the impending Inquisition's army, mercenaries from who were hired from private companies raised the security, puzzled.

Five Dragoon machines were guarding near the outer wall, and their pilots were chatting while remaining cautious.

《"I wonder if they really started a war, the Alchemist."》

《"We are just hired mercenaries. Shut up and do your duties."》

《"Even so, this is disturbing. Deploying two hundred Dragoons is unheard of. Also, isn't it just a request from fifth laboratory rather than headquarters themselves? Is this really alright?"》

《"Inquisition is useless, I wonder if they will really come."》

No difference even if they do, and with that the surrounding mercenaries laughed together.

All of them were strays raised in the border, veterans who experienced combat many times.

They were requested by fifth laboratory, they all gathered for the sake of profit by acting as their muscles.

The guy in charge of Alchemist's security told them that the Dragoons were paid for by Alchemist, as such they are free to treat them rough, and handle them as they wanted.

It was just what the mercenaries wanted.

《"Still, it's creepy, the guys at fifth laboratory. Even though there were a lot of researchers coming and going before, now it's just a handful of them. Where did they go? The guys who remained have such poor complexion they look like corpses."》

《"Indeed. Also, that nasty smell... they might really be corpses."》

《"Well, as long as they pay us I don't care. After this I won't have to work for my entire life, that's cheap."》

The Dragoon shouldered a gun, the mercenaries continued to guard the outer wall.

That's when, there was a reaction on the radar, it came from the direction of the buildings in Grey City.

He zoomed the camera in, and acquired the target.

Even so, he though it's probably a vagrant or something like that,

《"...eh, what's that."》

It was an unexpected visitor, the mercenary furrowed his brows.

Displayed from the camera, was a person who wore an armour as he walked in the rain. It seemed like his comrades also zoomed their cameras' in and acquired the target.

《"It doesn't seem like he's equipped with a Dragoon. And he's not holding a gun... is that... a sword?"》

《"A sword? Are you joking? Isn't that some pervert with a cosplay hobby?"》

As he said that, the mercenary approached the armored knight while aiming his gum at him.

《"Hey, stop! You cosplay bastard, what are you doing here? If you don't want to die, surrender and discard your weapon. Turn back and go participate in some geek event!"》

He mocked and provoked him, the Dragoons in the back responded with laughter.

——A moment.

shink...!*

A sound as if wind was cut through.

Wondering what was it, the mercenaries stopped laughing, and saw something unbelievable.

A rifle made of orichalcum was lying on the ground, sheared in half.

Although they looked again in a hurry, they could no longer see the armor-clad knight.

《"W-what... where did he go?!"》

He unplugged the handgun from the Dragoon's waist and looked around.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Mantis Slope."

A voice from above.

The mercenaries immediately turned their cameras directly above,

———**kadzun!**

A distorted sound of metal being pierced through rang out.

The Dragoons behind saw all of it.

When they thought the armored knight had disappeared, the barrel fell, and the moment they blinked, the knight fell from the sky.

He pierced the head of the Dragoon with the blade as he dropped, and he landed on the shoulder armor like a leopard. By twisting his sword he cut a few lines in the Dragoon, finishing it.

The armored knight——Takeru, with bright red eyes like that of a beast, he turned towards the remaining Dragoons.

To mercenaries, it looked like an evil spirit straight out of the myths.

《"——Hiihh."》

But it was too late.

The demon had jumped off the Dragoon's wreckage to eradicate the remaining ones.

《"E-enemy attack! Too fast! What is this guy!"》

Inside the outer wall. The communication reached all the mercenaries who have been making preparations for interception in fifth laboratory.

《 "What's the location? That's outside right, report how many of them is there. Are they Dragoons?"》

《"No! Human!"》

《"Human? You're joking right?"》

《"An armor-equipped human! I wouldn't use the emergency line for a joke——uwaaaaaa!"》

With a noise, the communication was interrupted.

Unexpectedly, the situation turned into something unbelievable, everyone was stunned.

...**gonk**...

All of a sudden, the wall in front of the mercenaries who were guarding the inside was cut in a V-shape, causing them to tremble in fear.

The outer wall fell down and a heavy sound rang out, a cloud of dust has risen.

It should have been made out of adamantium, which is an anti-magic material. It wouldn't budge even if it were to be shot with by a tank. That wall shouldn't be destroyed as easily as this.

The mercenaries changed into thermographic camera, and remained cautious.

An enemy stood in the middle without hiding himself. A human——clad in armor.

《"...impossible... I can't believe it."》

Seeing something so unbelievable, he took a step back.

A knight with red eyes, wearing an armor in the middle of the rain, he was indeed there.

Takeru tore down the outer wall and entered, he confirmed the enemy forces inside.

A tremendous amount of forces. Only once has he saw this many Dragoons deployed, and that was on TV.

《"Main forces of Alchemist, "Cyclops" type Dragoons. Although they are highly mobile, the armor is slightly worse than usual. If possible it's best to aim at the joints."》

"Certainly, they are brittle... I cut one's arm off without using witch hunter form before."

《"This time hostiles are not magical. Since they are using an anti-magic armor, the most effective means are physical attacks."》

"Rather than going against that cunning sorcerer, I prefer this, it's simpler."

《"Yes. I'm turning the magic to strengthen the body. Please pull the trigger to change the sword mode. I will match your intentions."》

"Understood."

《"Well then, enjoy yourself."》

"Got it!"

At the same time as Takeru appeared in the middle, Dragoons rushed at Takeru all at once, smoke came out from their boosters.

There were ten of them. They turned around and attacked all at once.

Takeru pulled the trigger, and instantly sheathed the sword in the sheath that appeared.

Then, he pulled the sword to the back of his waist and twisted his waist to the limit.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Single Wheel."

Omnidirectional sword technique, Single Wheel.

He slashed drawing a full circle, because the sword extended when he pressed the trigger after pulling it out, it caused damage in a fairly wide range.

The enemy Dragoons had their knees cut all at once and tipped over. As they struggled to move, their upper bodies were unable to take aim.

In just a moment, an entire platoon was wiped out.

But the enemy's attacks didn't end with just this.

《"——Don't approach him! Shoot him with guns! Shoot! Shoot him!"》

Hearing about the situation, the mercenaries from behind the building started shooting at him simultaneously with their assault rifles.

And Takeru,

"——Haaa!!"

Obviously knocked it all down.

After triggering the Soumatou, he cut down the entire bullet storm with the least movements required.

Seeing an armored knight dancing with the momentum like a tornado, the Dragoon pilots were terrified.

They squeezed their triggers until the magazines were empty, the gun smoke has risen and they no could no longer see the armored knight.

All of them, were plunged into despair. Thinking they already lost.

Alive. The enemy was alive. He wasn't taken down even by a barrage like that.

Indeed, any moment, from that smoke he will——

《"?! A-above!"》

One of them shouted, and all of them looked at the sky.

There, was a swordsman with a sparkling armor among the rain-clouds——

——**giinnn**

The middle machine tried to reload a magazine in time before it was cut.

Although it tried to replace it by moving the manipulator in a hurry, that opening was fatal.

Unable to trace him with their eyes, the Dragoons bent down.

With an azure sword's cutting trajectory acting like a lamp, a nightmarish after-image of an armored knight burned itself into pilots memory.

None of them has ever seen Dragoons being trampled over so easily.

Looking again, there was one more machine.

Its operator couldn't even raise a scream, he just shook and trembled while holding the controls.

You're next, as if saying that to the left-over dragoon. The armored knight pointed his sword towards the cockpit.

《"Aaa...aa...uuu..."》

"Out of my way if you don't want to die! If you seriously want to die, my arm is ready any time!"

《"............ngh"》

"If you still want to fight, I will fight you with my life on the line!"

With a murderous intent, Takeru declared towards the pilot.

gakun, like a puppet that lost its strings, the Dragoon dropped to its knees.

Seeing enemy losing the will to fight, Takeru withdrew his sword and took a breath entering a state of relaxed alertness.

《"Well done."》

"...Lapis, do you know anything about Suginami's whereabouts or the facilities experimenting on elves?"

《"Please wait for a moment. Constructing FM bits——diffusing."》

In response to Takeru's call, Lapis materialized an azure sphere, then diffused it to search the facility.

《 "...I couldn't locate Suginami-sama's heat response, however the top floor of the tower is covered in a powerful anti-magic material, it has jamming installed. Probably, that is the elves experiment station, eventually Suginami-sama will arrive at those coordinates."》

"The top floor. That's troublesome... can you give me the shortest route?"

《"If we continue this way, we'll have to make a detour. We can take the straight route towards the tower but the security there is more solid."》

"Understood... by the way, Lapis."

《"What is it."》

"You, can't you fly?"

《"? You mean in a sense, as in flying in the sky?"》

"Yeah."

As Takeru came up with a ridiculous request, Lapis went silent for a moment.

Even Takeru thought that no matter how inhuman the force she demonstrates, he asked for the impossible.

《"There are no wings so flight is impossible. However, its possible to glide to some extent after jumping."》

"Really? You're really amazing."

《"............ Host, please refrain from complimenting me during battle."》

"Why?"

《"I'll get embarrassed."》

That was unexpected, Takeru suddenly looked at the sword with his eyes wide open. Embarrassed? A sword is embarrassed?

What, that's new. Lapis who usually clings to him even when he's half-naked without blushing was embarrassed. Although he wondered what that meant, he ended up with a conclusion he took for granted.

Because Lapis is a sword, she wouldn't understand what shame was for humans, she wouldn't be pleased after being called a beautiful woman.

I see. She was embarrassed after being praised as a weapon. Takeru looked at her as if she was his prey and laughed.

"Haha, you're unexpectedly cute. That's quite refreshing——"

《"A turbulence will occur during the operations causing the witch hunter form to be released and if it comes to the worst Host's upper and lower body connection might be undone——"》

"——I will be careful from now on."

Takeru's face turned blue and he lowered his hips.

He bent his knees and put all his strength into his legs.

gigi*, *gigigigi...

Armour-clad leg's muscles released a distorted sound, and cracks appeared on the ground.

And,

"——Fuhh!!"

Releasing his knees like a spring, he kicked off the ground.

After jumping up, Takeru's ascended up to the sky like a swallow.

《"Releasing FM booster, adding propulsion to leap."》

At the same time magic was released from the armor covering Takeru's soles, acting like a booster.

After he rose up to the limit, he started to descend.

He was gliding through the sky relatively slow, and could see the entire facility.

"It's huge... also, the number of Dragoons is..."

《"If you were to go against all of them, even Host and I wouldn't last long."》

"Is that so?"

《"The amount of magic power produced by me is smaller compared to other Relic Eaters. With absorption as a characteristic, I was made under the assumption I will obtain magic from external sources."》

"I see. Even you have weak points."

《"............my apologies."》

"N-no, I don't blame you alright? You're doing really well. Please don't go depressed?"

He didn't want to be sheared in half by because of depression. He wanted to believe that the magic booster's power wasn't reduced because of her mood.

After calming himself down, he landed on the roof of a building before leaping again.

Although it wasn't as big as the school that functioned like a city, it was of a size comparable to that. Looking down below, there were a lot of Dragoons moving around restlessly, probably looking for Takeru.

《 "Go through the roof of the building, please go north-north-west. By adjusting your body orientation you can adjust the booster."》

If he keeps flying like that, he will eventually arrive at the innermost tower.

The enemies wouldn't think he moves through the sky.

Just when he though that,

《"——A heat source incoming from the front. Host, please avoid."》

Right after she said that, Takeru lightly avoided towards the right, immediately after that,

A huge shell whizzed past right in front of his face.

"Wha——?!"

《"It's an enemy grenade. I believe it is a self-propelled artillery installed on the outer walls."》

"This is bad!"

A sound of bombardment could be heard in a distance, a moment later another bullet approached Takeru.

He triggered Soumatou and slashed the shelling with all his strength.

"——Gahh!!"

The shelling divided into two and exploded, the blast hit Takeru.

《"Minor damage. However, if it continues there will be a lot of damage despite the magical armor."》

"It can't be helped, let's fly as low as possible...!"

《"——Enemy shadow behind us."》

Takeru inverted his body right after the warning report, and looked behind him.

There, were two Dragoon machines following Takeru as he flew.

The Dragoons were holding rifles, and started to shoot at him.

"They were adapted for flight...!"

《"A new model of Dragoon, "Byakhee". We're at a disadvantage in aerial combat."》

"Shit... that's a tough customer... Lapis, can you turn into a kusarigama?"

He pulled the trigger and Lapis changed into a kusarigama.

While continuing to escape from the Dragoons, Takeru started to swing the kusarigama's chain.

And when the rotation reached its peak, he flung it towards the rear with all his strength.

But, because Takeru is extremely clumsy, the sickle was blown away in wrong direction.

《"Host, remote attacks——"》

"It's fine, just look!"

Takeru clutched onto the chain that seemed to stretch forever, and then suddenly wielded it moving it sideways.

As if cutting enemy with a sword, the blade affixed to a chain spun.

The sickle changed direction going after them, and the chain twisted like a snake coiling around them.

When Takeru confirmed the chain has captured the enemy, he turned off the boosters and fell straight down.

And, he flung the chain over his shoulder.

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style——Snake Belt Drop!"

And like that, they were slammed into the ground.

The Dragoons hit the ground along with the chain, its limbs were crushed and scattered on the ground.

A moment later, Takeru landed on the ground making a crater.

《"I'm surprised. You can use a kusarigama as well."》

"...I've told you, that the Kusanagi-style doesn't use only swords. If you think of the chain as the swords extension it'll somehow work out. Well, I'm kinda bad with it, but this much is..."

He stood up and exhaled deeply.

After taking care of the enemy somehow, he had to refrain from moving in the air any more than that. Because he couldn't tense himself in the air, he could only wield the sword with his upper body. That's why no matter how much he uses kusarigama, it's not efficient to fight that way.

That is the reason why fighting on the ground was better.

...but even with that said.

"...this is bad."

After noticing where he landed, cold sweat quickly covered him.

It was the main street directly in front of main gate.

In other words——right in the middle of enemy forces.

"Seems like we were guided here."

《"It can't be helped. Let's break through the front."》

"No other way but to do it."

Kusarigama changed form and returned to that of a nodachi, he set it up.

The countless Dragoons around him have turned their muzzles towards him.

It was truly an explosive situation. An individual versus an entire group. At an overwhelming disadvantage, Takeru tried to start up the struggle completely fearless.

《"——Kusanagi! Are you alright?!"》

That's when, a communication via magic resonance sounded in his ear.

That voice, was Ouka's.

Just when Takeru was about to respond, there was an explosion and smoke appeared on the main street in the direction of the gate.

Every few seconds there was more explosions and smoke rising from them, they were gradually approaching him.

The surrounding enemies didn't know what was happening and were confused, he saw a figure of a Dragoon machine moving on a caterpillar from the direction of the main gate.

With the guns blazing, the Dragoon approached Takeru.

"...allies?"

《"Inquisition emblem confirmed. They're allies. Seems like a new model."》

The Dragoon identified as an ally slid through the main street with his speed, and slaughtered the enemy Dragoons whose reaction was delayed.

《"——The third brigade is destroyed! All squads are to guard the main gate!"》

《"Shit! Because of the irregular all our defenses has collapsed! The damn attack Inquisition launched rushed at us all at once!"》

《"I've never seen Dragoons like that! New models?! They're too fast...!!"》

The fifth laboratory's mercenaries were completely crushed by Takeru's assault forces. The main gate was breached by Inquisition's Dragoon troops, and the route to the tower turned into a melee combat.

Even the mercenary troops who came after that were immediately destroyed when they entered the main street that was dominated by Inquisition.

As the Dragoons and infantry fought and the main street was filled with blood, screams, and dancing smoke, a white-haired man was comfortably walking together with three members of Dullahan.

Even though bullets and shells were flying around close enough for them to feel the wind pressure, they weren't scared at all. They were walking in a pace as if they were on a stroll in the park under the moonlight.

"This air, how nostalgic. Gun smoke and blood, the smell of burnt iron. Right right, dance, dance. Humans have to be like this."

Sougetsu wasn't surprised even when a bullet grazed his cheek, and continued to walk in a relaxed manner.

"Chairman, ain't this dangerous. Why don't'cha at least go to the back? I'll be killed by captain if something happens to you, Chairman."

A Dullahan who looked like a young boy made a serious request for Sougetsu, causing him to turn to look behind him.

"Don't ask something's stupid. What would happen if the general didn't go first? The people who stand on the top, should be standing in front at all times, it's fine as long as I don't die."

"...geez, that's not really convincing."

In the first place, this isn't the front lines. Is what the Dullahan whispered to himself.

Sougetsu exaggeratedly opened his arms wide, and spoke in secret. He rotated the musket he was holding in his hands once.

At the same time, the enemy Dragoons came from both sides of a crossroad.

"That's why young ones bring me so much trouble. Very well, this Chairman shall teach you what lies at the heart of Inquisition."

Sougetsu without even casting as much as a glance at the Dragoon close behind him, turned his gun.

"First——Inquisition doesn't choose means."

At the same time as he declared that, he pulled the trigger.

The bullet hit Dragoon head-on.

However, even after it hit, there was no sound of impact.

"Second——against witches, and those who cooperate with them, there's no mercy."

The trigger was pulled again, and the enemy was struck for the second time.

After taking a close look, it seemed like the bullet slipped through the Dragoon's armor.

"Third——If it's suspicious, punish it! Whether men or women, young or old, whether it was right or wrong, do it thoroughly!"

In the end, Sougetsu rotated the gun again, and while holding it firmly he shot forward.

A direct hit.

The Dragoon was unscathed. Six machines headed towards them, the sound of caterpillars filled the air as they rushed in and began a shooting spree.

The enemy hasn't lost their will. Even if its flesh and blood humans, they won't be caught off guard in this situation.

If there was one thing they let down, it was their guard

It would be the confidence in the anti-magic armor and not avoiding Sougetsu's bullets.

The moment they tried to follow up with their attack, suddenly, three out of six machines started running berserk and swung blades at their allies and opened rapid fire at them as well.

《"——What the hell are you bastards doing!"》

《"The hell are you fuckers——guwaaah!!"》

《"Stop, I beg you stop it——!!"》

The three Dragoons got wrecked by the allies' attacks.

Three remaining Dragoons that betrayed their allies now stopped running, and pointed muzzles at their own chests.

《"——The hammer of witches."》

《"——Judges the heretics."》

《"——Bringing a rain of death upon the suspects."》

Simultaneously, the three machines started shooting. The armors withstood the first few shots, however the bullets started breaching the insides before the magazine was exhausted. The three Dragoons fell down on their knees, with blood flowing out from the bullet holes.

The mercenaries supporting them from behind showed consternation.

That gun was weird. Even though it looked like a musket, and as such it should be unable to fire at such a fast rate, and yet Sougetsu shot three shots in a row.

No, are those things fired really bullets?

The enemy captain's machine scanned Sougetsu's gun after zooming in.

《The Malleus Maleficarum Prototype "Innocentius"》

That's what the musket Sougetsu held had carved on it.

《"Relic...Eater...!"》

The captain's unit trembled in fear.

Stepping towards the trembling enemy, Sougetsu aimed the musket's muzzle at them.

As if wrapped in the darkness, with white hair, a grin like that of a cheshire cat on his face, glowing like a moon.

His appearance looked as if he was a grim reaper on a hunt for souls...

"Today, because of a talk I had with a certain female fox, I'm in a really bad mood."

Fear, overflowed.

"Heretic gentlemen, I will allow you to choose. For you guys who are not witches, what kind of judgment is your favorite?"

His lips curled up revealing his sharp teeth that seemed like a crescent moon.

"A lenient sentence? Be burned at stake? Or maybe chopped to pieces?"

In response to Sougetsu's words, the gun was filled with magical flint and the hammer automatically rose up.

Together with it, his Cheshire cat grin reached its peak.

"Now, grant them their wishes——Innocentius."

And the evilest Relic Eater, the original witch hunter Innocentius laughed fiercely.

Takeru was stunned seeing the street occupied by friendly Dragoons.

Why did Inquisition intervene in this place?

As he wondered about that,

《"Don't space out! Behind you!"》

He heard Ouka's voice being transmitted again.

After he turned around in a hurry, he saw an enemy Dragoon holding a blade above him.

Takeru immediately readied himself to fight back, but before he could, something that looked like a stake pierced through the Dragoon.

An attack? From where?

Just as he thought that, **tap**, along with a light sound Ouka fell right beside him.

"That was dangerous. Kusanagi, are you alright?"

Takeru's looked at her with both a serious and questioning look on his face, Ouka proudly put a hand on her hip and grimaced.

"That's my line. Why didn't you respond to us? We've been calling out for you this entire time."

"Sorry, the intercom broke."

"...seriously. I thought it was like that so I used Relic Eater resonance."

She said that and threw Takeru a spare intercom.

Takeru caught the intercom and then started telling Ouka everything that happened to him and Ikaruga.

"...so it's like that after all. It's more or less the same as what Saionji said."

About what he said of Ikaruga exchanging them for Lost Matrix, she seemed to intuitively know it already.

The next transmission that came through the intercom was from Usagi.

《"Kusanagi... you're alright? That's really good."》

With a voice that seemed a bit relieved Takeru asked where was she.

《"I'm on the outer wall. I'll safeguard you guys as a sniper from here. I don't know if I'll be useful but, even I..."》

"I'm counting on you, Usagi."

When he said that, she gasped and lively responded with a yes.

"Oh right, what about Mari?"

"She's useless so we left her together with the Chairman. She can't use magic so she has no fighting force. There is no use for her."

Hmph, she snorted and looked away.

Even though she said it like that, probably she didn't want to involve Mari when she couldn't use her magic.

"We need to hurry. If Inquisition knows that Suginami was involved in experiments on elves, she will most likely be arrested. Before that, I want to hear the truth from her.'

"............"

"Leave the full story for later. First, we need to rescue Suginami..."

He didn't know where did they learn it from , but Ouka and the others seemed to know that Suginami was a "Designs Child".

Ouka said she won't arrest Suginami until she knows the truth, and will first ascertain the truth.

If it was at the time when she first enlisted in the platoon, she would have captured Ikaruga without asking any questions.

"...why are you looking at me like that."

Ouka gave Takeru a questioning look.

Takeru looked away with a slightly happy smile on his face.

"It's nothing."

"...for some reason that expression annoys me. Stop that."

"I told you it's nothing."

Ootori's edges also seemed to have slightly dulled, while smiling secretly he shouldered his sword, turned around and pointed at the tower.

"Usagi, are you ready? We leave the support to you."

《"Y-yes, any time!"》

As expected, she was nervous like always, but she responded clearly.

"I'll cut the garrison. Ouka will intercept enemy from behind me, I leave the ones I miss to you."

"Leave it to me."

Ouka poised with two handguns, the Vlad in her hands and squinted.

Takeru also prepared for combat, breathed in deeply and stopped.

"——35th Test Platoon, sortie!"

Together with that declaration, Takeru started to run towards the tower with his comrade.

Fifth laboratory, the top floor of the tower, level 6 barrier walls.

In an open space covered with white walls, Ikaruga and Isuka looked at the incubator.

"Seems like the battle has started outside... seems like hard work."

On one of the monitors the incubator was equipped with, the image from outside was displayed. Multiple Dragoons were engaged in battle, and as far as it could be seen, Inquisition was the one who dominated the battlefield.

"How nostalgic, Ikaruga."

Isuka looked up at the incubator and asked.

"I don't feel any nostalgia from this."

Ikaruga shook her head writing it off as ridiculous.

Isuka expected that response, and didn't mention it anymore.

"I feel it. Those four years, when I look up at this guy. I still remember the hatred from back then."

"…………?"

"Four years, Ikaruga. I waited impatiently for this… if you didn't escape with Lost Matrix I would have been able to proceed further."

"…………"

"Together with you."

Isuka who didn't possess any feelings of decency, stared at Ikaruga with face full of hatred.

Ikaruga as well, turned towards Isuka.

"Why did you betray me?"

"I didn't intend to betray you. I just wanted to go out."

Ikaruga made a bitter smile and looked at Isuka with sympathy.

"Thanks to that picture book, it became boring. I got tired of being only used to develop weapons for killing people."

"…………"

"I thought there are a lot more interesting things outside. Things I don't know, interesting things I didn't experience yet… a lot of them."

"…did you find them?"

Isuka asked Ikaruga.

Ikaruga relaxed her face, and narrowed her eyes before she clearly said.

"Yeah. It was a world more shitty than I thought it would be… but I found one. Something very fun."

"Question. What was that?"

"Well, that's… it's hard to describe it, but if you really want to know."

Ikaruga scowled as if she was in front of a very difficult problem, then hit her hand and immediately raised her index finger.

"Youth, or something like that."

And the atmosphere froze.

"——Ridiculous. For something so silly, I have lost a lot of things."

Contrary to her speech, Isuka's face convulsed, she didn't move.

No, to be exact, she didn't move to the point only her cheek convulsed.

As "Designs Children" originally didn't have many emotions, and were dedicated to study, even so, they never restricted their facial expressions.

Ikaruga looked at Isuka's behavior suspiciously.

"You wouldn't know. What kind of treatment I have received because of you."

"…………?"

"After you left, I was subjected to re-education by the higher-ups. It wasn't just my body… even the way of thinking as an "Designs Child" has been forced on me."

"…Isuka…"

"Thanks to that, I'm in this plight. My facial expressions were limited… and severe pain runs through my brain when I embrace an useless emotion."

As Isuka's cheek convulsed, she gently placed a hand on her forehead.

Re-education. It was education only in name, it was a kind of torture.

They caused her pain by executing a special brain treatment. They planted nanomachines in sites in charge of emotions, unbearable pain ran through her the moment she harbored inappropriate emotions. This so-called re-education was inhuman treatment.

Probably, Alchemist didn't want to let go of Isuka's excellence, and forced her into submission by re-educating her.

The uncomfortable feeling Ikaruga had for a while now, was caused by this.

"It's your fault, Ikaruga."

"…wait, this is weird. It was my fault that experiment failed. It wasn't your fault. Even though Alchemist is horrible, however they're reasonable, they wouldn't do something unnecessary like that. You were excellent… and you were obedient as well… so why re-education?"

It was as Ikaruga said, Alchemist only carried out re-education with those who tried to get out like Ikaruga.

A procedure that only people who awakened useless intense emotions and ego was performed on.

Ikaruga looked at the state of Isuka who was peeking out from behind her fingers, and noticed.

"You… you didn't…"

For a moment, Isuka staggered and put her hand on the incubator, and she took out something from the pocket of her red lab coat.

"——It was your fault!"

Isuka threw the item she took out to Ikaruga.

It was, a beaten up old book.

"Canary's house"

It was from the time she was still in the lab, the book Ikaruga read, and learned morality from.

Isuka covered her face with her hand, and her body shook.

"If you... if you didn't pick up something like this... I...!!"

Ikaruga sighed with guilt and compassion.

She made a mistake when it came to Isuka.

Thinking that she would remain a "Designs Child" she was back then.

But it was wrong. She picked up the book Ikaruga left behind.

Because of that her ego sprouted, her feelings awakened, and longing for outside world was born.

When the higher-ups noticed that.

Originally she would have been killed, but higher-ups didn't want to lose Isuka's talent, and subjected her to re-education.

Same to Ikaruga, if she didn't run away, she would have been subjected to the same treatment.

"If I didn't read that thing... If I didn't learn unnecessary emotions... I would have continued to live happily like back then...! I was satisfied just by aiming ahead with you...! Despite that... because of you... all of it..."

"..........."

"Because you... you have... changed me...!"

Her expression didn't change, the feelings of hatred welled up, and severe pain ran through Isuka's head.

Definitely she couldn't suppress it in front of Ikaruga who was the main cause, they were unstoppable emotions. Sweat appeared on Isuka's body, and her breath became rough.

...it wasn't just Kanaria, I pushed Isuka down the abyss as well.

Ikaruga hung her head, and regret lodged itself in her chest.

Isuka looked at Ikaruga who was tormented by guilt, and the spasms on her face stopped.

"...however I don't care about that, I'm fine with it. I didn't succumb to those guys' oppression. I will leave this place in my own way. Just like you did..."

"............"

"If I succeed with restoration of the elves, Valhalla will release the equipment in my brain with magic and accept me. Finally, with this my hell will end. I will be released from this cage."

Isuka regained her original calmness, and extended both of her hands to Ikaruga.

"Now, give the Lost Matrix to me... I don't know what are you plotting, but it's already too late. Resistance is useless, the sentry guns are already aimed at you."

After looking, she found multiple automatic guns equipped on the edges of the space.

Ikaruga closed her eyes, and took out a small safe containing the Lost Matrix from the bag.

The same material as used in this space, it was something made out of a first class anti-magic material.

Ikaruga passed that to Isuka.

"The password is... kanaria."

That was, the one whom she made in exchange for her freedom, a name of an elf half breed.

"A sentiment. It was too late to embrace such a thing... it's a sin that can no longer be wiped off."

Ikaruga said that, and Isuka entered the password.

After an electronic sound, the sound of lock being released rang out.

Isuka put her hand inside the safe, and then——she spat out a sigh.

"............what are you intending, this is..."

Isuka convulsed while having a headache, she lightly tossed the safe aside, and it dropped down on the ground.

The safe that rolled on the ground was empty.

"You're hiding it even this late into the game. Tell me where have you hidden the Lost Matrix."

"............"

"So it's still in the academy?"

"............"

"If you're not going to say it. I can just extract the memory by dismantling your brain. In any case, you're going to be killed by my hands anyway."

Isuka took out something that seemed like a needle from the sleeve of her red lab coat.

The needle sticking out was separated, the way it was made reminded of a female insect's leg.

At the same time, the sentry guns deployed on the edge of the space turned there muzzle at Ikaruga.

Ikaruga closed her eyes unfazed.

"Lost Matrix... the cells of the elf, are here."

Hearing the truth being said indifferently, Isuka tilted her head.

Ikaruga narrowed her eyes as she looked at Isuka who didn't understand the meaning of her words.

"Hey, Isuka. Do you know why did I come back here?"

"As you can see, I have no idea."

"There are two reasons. First, is to prevent the restoration of the elves by destroying this place."

Hearing Ikaruga's words, Isuka who was worried, suddenly laughed while continuing to remain expressionless.

"Ahhahahahaha! After all this you're still going to take things away from me! You're so greedy! But this facility, but this space is covered with ultra-hard anti-magic material, the needles in the incubator, and the experimental facilities are the same. It was originally made in the case of having a successful restoration, measures to prevent the elf from running away, it can't be so destroyed normally."

Even with Isuka's provocation, Ikaruga wasn't shaken.

Isuka warned and glared at her.

"The other reason was to... take you away from this place."

Ikaruga said that while staring at Isuka.

Isuka wasn't sure herself what were those feelings that exploded in her, was it frustration, sadness, or anger, but she withstood the immeasurable pain.

"...this late...what are you...!"

"At that time, when I ran away from this place... the fact that I didn't take you with me, I regret that even now. If I took you away the restoration of elves would have surely derailed as well."

"......you...who the hell......"

"That's right. It might be greedy. But if you were on this side, you would understand."

"............"

"Even without the Lost Matrix, as long as you are out there, the experiment would continue."

It was her opinion as a scientist, as a researcher, and as an inquisitor.

With such a reason, even Isuka would be convinced. It was indeed reasonable. She could understand that not doing that before would cause her to regret it, she could understand.

However,

"But that's not all."

Ikaruga added more to it.

Not as a researcher, but as a human, a person.

"When I was here, just like your place was together with me, my place was to be together with you. And I ran away leaving it, it's definitely the worst. Even now, I regret it."

"............"

"So I, once again——"

"Don't fuck with meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee!!"

She clenched her fist, and roared into the heavens because of the pain.

"I..! I don't need you anymore! You're my enemy! Now I'm going to break out to the world as an alchemist of Valhalla! As far as I'm concerned the outside world can eat shit! It's because of the outside world I ended up like this! I will, for the sake of saving myself, destroy the world! I don't need you to save me!"

She had a red, hollow face.

It was too late, no matter what she says, Isuka's hatred won't disappear. Ikaruga couldn't wash it away.

"...I see. A shame."

Ikaruga told that to Isuka who resented her, and put a hand on her chest.

"I, I will not allow you to take away the place I belong to. If you destroy the world, the place I belong to will perish as well. If you don't come with me, you are my enemy."

"...the place...you belong to?"

"That's right. There is one in that school, a gathering of clumsy people. That's currently the place I belong to. It's very, very precious, and a more interesting place than anywhere else."

"...in that case——just like you did with mine, I will destroy that place of yours!!"

The moment Isuka shook her arm, a sentry gun fired a bullet which pierced through Ikaruga's thigh.

Ikaruga staggered slightly, and she raised her leg up without letting out a scream.

**clank*, a sound rang out as she thrust the high-heels into the floor.

The blood, stained the pure white.

Even so, Ikaruga kept standing.

Disorderly bangs that looked like silk ran down her cheeks, and black eyes peeped from behind.

"Now! If you still have any more sense of guilt, hand it over! There's no other way you can atone for it!!"

"...you have knotholes for eyes. Can't you see? For a while now, the elven cells were in front of you."

"...?! What are you talking about?"

"Just as I said. Aren't they in front of you? You can't see? ...see."

Ikaruga reached out to her chest again.

And she unbuttoned her blouse, exposing her breasts slightly.

She placed her finger on the center, in part of the valley, and said.

"The cells of an elf——are right here."

While touching her chest with her fingertips, she licked her bewitching lips.

"...wha......?......——!!"

Isuka, immediately after raising a questioning voice, understood the meaning of Ikaruga's words.

Looking closely, her breasts... the central portion of it was of a different color.

Ikaruga's skin was horribly white, on the other hand, the color of the skin there was brown.

The skin there, as if it was transplanted in or eroded, merged with Ikaruga's own.

"...as a scientist... you probably know about "Philosopher's Stone", right."

Isuka stepped back in awe.

As for Ikaruga, she closed on Isuka with open arms.

"What ancient alchemists tried to create in the past, the culmination of the magic and science. Minerals, organisms, a ridiculous idea to redesign an object from the very foundation and to create something completely different out if it, the research was tried several times, still, it was just an unreachable pipe dream none were able to create."

As Ikaruga walked while extending her arm, an abnormality occurred.

biribiri, suddenly her wavy black hair released electricity.

"What if it was realized by using modern science...?"

"Impossible! Absurd!"

"Oh, Isuka... you are disqualified as a scientist."

The brown skin on Ikaruga's chest resonated with her heartbeat.

"——From the moment impossible left your mouth, the road "ahead" closed for you."

That moment, when it seemed like the brown skin was wriggling, it expanded as if attacking Ikaruga's entire body.

The pure white skin turned brown, the eye color was inverted, whites turned black, and black pupils turned white. Beautiful black hair, turned into stunning silver hair. And Ikaruga's small ears, extended and became so visible they were obvious.

That appearance, truly——was just like the weapons that plunged humanity into despair once, the dark elves themselves.

Isuka, in response to Ikaruga's appearance, took a step back in awe.

"I-impossible...! Based on elven cells, using "Philosopher's Stone" to rewrite your genes?!"

"That's how it is. It's more efficient than trying to control the elves. There's no need to bother with something so annoying."

"...that's impossible!"

"Rather doing something like that, I turned myself into an elf."

Ikaruga said so, and her mouth distorted

Impossible. Isuka tried to deny Ikaruga's words many times in her head.

"Philosopher's Stone"

It was just like Ikaruga said, a theme anyone dreamed of, scientists and researchers. It was true that there were many alchemists who repeated fruitless research in pursuit of it.

However, if it there was a proposal to attempt at making it in modern times, everyone would laugh at it.

It was just SF. Just a pipe dream. Everyone believe it to be so.

And Ikaruga has done such a thing——

"—...———......ha, hahaha, ahahahahaha."

Isuka looked at Ikaruga and cast a gaze full of awe while hiding her face behind her fingers.

"You——you are crazy! No matter how much you struggle you are a Suginami! You're insane! It's not a concept that can be understood by an ordinary human!"

"............"

"You are the same as back then! You tried to mingle with normal people, it was being unreasonable right from the start!"

Isuka pointed at Ikaruga, and showered her with praises as a model mad scientist.

Ikaruga, had a slightly sad expression on her face.

"That may be so. Perhaps I have no right to live an ordinary life."

But you know, Ikaruga made a slight smile as she added that.

"I found a normal place that would accept someone like me. That's why——"

Ikaruga sharply narrowed her eyes.

That moment, under her feet, a white magical circle appeared.

"——I absolutely won't let it be destroyed. If you want to destroy it, I'll destroy you before that happens."

Magic overflowed from Ikaruga's body.

Elves use magic as easily as they breathe.

That saying wasn't a lie. The amount of magic generated by elves, was approximately 200 times the maximum value a witch classified as S-rank risk possessed. It was a top class magic among the fantastical organisms.

Elves had no properties.

It could be adapted to any ancient property, the strongest was the "Lack" of property.

"I'm not interested in magic. I'm not interested in studying operative procedures either, I don't know how to use advanced magic. As expected after refraining from adapting my brain to elves, using magic as easily as I were to breathe is impossible."

"...what... do you intend?!"

"That's why, I have developed my original magic."

As she laughed, her teeth resembled a crescent moon.

【 "Constructing a process——formula based on required material magic substitute, the manifested target is "Sky", "Magnetism" fixing the property with magical barrier, assuming harmful radiation "Seal" permanently sealed the property——collapsing cooperative procedure execution——**6"demolish→2"menace+e*+Ve+0.78FmeV——**"】

After high-speed chanting with a voice that seemed like it was fast forwarded, Ikaruga held it in both of her hands, and made a gesture as if she was scooping water.

That moment, in Ikaruga's hands, a mysterious brilliant light appeared.

It was fierce and intimidating, and caused Isuka to feel cosmic fear.

"Made an antimatter."

With a devilish smile, Ikaruga brought the light in her hands to Isuka and asked her, "Magic is amazing. The saying that it can be used for anything isn't just for show. With a non-standard magical capacity, even something like this can be made."

"——......!! Stop it! If I come into contact with such a substance——"

"What are you saying. Wasn't Isuka the one who said it can't be destroyed normally. A weapon of mass destruction like a nuke would destroy it? You love these things don't you, Isuka."

Acting like its nothing, Ikaruga said while flickering the matter generated by magic.

Isuka was covered with cold sweat, and headed towards the incubator that was made to restore the elves.

"—...! Do you know how hard was it for me to build this facility?! Even so, you want to take me out of here?! Or do you want to confine me here?!"

Revealing impatience, Isuka tried to block Ikaruga's magic somehow.

"Wrong. I will destroy this place, take you and return to the place I belong to."

"......—"

"I decided to take you by force. What you think, and what do you want to do doesn't matter. I'll take you. I won't commit the same mistake again."

Straight on, Ikaruga stabbed Isuka with her determination.

"I will destroy this rotten place."

"...no."

"I will save you."

"No... It's too late... why."

Isuka faced down, and clenched her fist.

She closed her lips tightly, and gritted her teeth to withstand.

But there, it was no longer the "Designs Child" Suginami Isuka.

"Stop this...already...my head...hurts."

"It's alright. Such a thing, I'll remove it."

"...even though you're the culprit... even though you ran away."

"............that's right."

"...even though... you left..."

"...that's right."

"...even though you took away... the place I belong to...."

"That's right."

Even though Ikaruga took a form of a variant, she gently smiled.

"That's why I——I'll be the place you belong to again."

That was Ikaruga's wish.

It wasn't redemption nor mercy.

It was Ikaruga's selfish wish, a honest conclusion.

"...uuu...guu......"

Isuka shook her head trying to withstand the pain, and slowly looked up.

Twitching and distorted, but Isuka had a very human expression, it was there.

She absolutely couldn't admit it. The fact that she wanted to go out together, it wouldn't come out of her mouth.

Even so, because of a wave of emotions that couldn't be suppressed, tears flowed out of her eyes.

She no longer had any energy to shake her head.

Don't look at me with such a gentle face.

If this goes on, I will nod.

Her body will surrender.

"I...Ikaruga...I-I."

Like a young child begging its mother with tears in its eyes, it was a timid and faint voice.

"...I—"

"——AaaAAAAAAaaaaaAAAAAAAAAAAaauu I can no longer bear it! It's impossible to watch in silence any longer! Isuka-saaan! Why did you hide such a wonderful passion!"

All of a sudden.

A distorted voice sounded in the pure white space. It was a harbinger of tragedy.

The moment Ikaruga and Isuka raised their faces, a black swamp appeared on the ceiling, and flapping black clothes that looked like devil's,

Despair——fell.

zashyuu...

A dull, tinged with moisture sound echoed.

The despair that was falling from the ceiling, swung down a karate chop tinged with magic from Isuka's left shoulder to her chest.

"——Ika...ru...ga."

Immediately after she raised a painful voice, blood overflowed from the wound.

But that blood wasn't spilled on the floor, but was sucked into Haunted's hands.

It seemed like he sucked something out.

Isuka's body lost its color in no time, and cracked.

Ikaruga stared dumbfounded with eyes wide open, she could only stare as Isuka's light was stolen.

"Yahoo! It was an inspiring sisterly affection! Isuka-san was a splendid person after all! That devastatingly despairing look was very lovely!"

The despair that controlled Isuka from the shadows, Haunted, pulled his hand out of her with a refreshing smile.

Isuka's body slowly fell down to the ground.

And Ikaruga,

Stretched her hand hoping she might be able to catch her, Ikaruga who pulverized her,

"aaAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

Raised a war cry in rage for the first time in her life, kicked the earth and sprinted.

And aimed the swelling antimatter that appeared in her hands at Haunted, and shot it.

"——《Catastrophe》!"

And spoke name of the magic.

The moment antimatter contacted the barrier deployed by Haunted.

——An explosion beyond anyone's imagination struck the facility.

The laboratory made for the sake of restoring elves, turned into a vortex of destruction.

Rampant destruction swallowed many devices, and made them literally disappear. The walls made out of first-class anti-magic material, weiss crystal, attempted to resist the destruction of Catastrophe, but it gradually started turning bright.

And, the experimental field for the restoration of the elves on the top flower of the tower broke down, it was blown away and scattered by the blast.

The Glossary

Nanomachines (ナノマシン) - Written as (賢者の石) meaning "Philosopher's Stone". I use both names depending on the context.

Catastrophe (カタストロフイ) - Written as (対消滅) which means pair annihilation of a particle and an anti-particle.

Chapter 5 - Mechanical Dragon

——Two minutes before 《Catastrophe》 was discharged.

"——Ootori! Do it!"

Takeru avoided the enemy's attack and slid between the Dragoon's feet, and shouted to Ouka immediately after.

"Roger that!"

Ouka leaped into the air, and fired two shots from Vlad.

At the same time as Takeru who rushed after rebuilding his posture, Ouka started running after she landed.

"Vlad! Wallachia's power is too low!"

《"Wallachia is a specialized physical stake it overwhelmingly lacks power. It is a special stake for penetrating magic, don't put too much confidence into it."》

"Bastard... at this rate...!"

《"If thou wishest of more power from me, sign the contr——"》

"I refuse!"

《"Obstinate. Truly obstinate."》

Continuing the usual familiar exchange, Ouka chased after Takeru.

Ouka's body strengthening was minimal, so catching up with Takeru's speed was very difficult. Still, she had to reduce the burden on Takeru as much as possible.

Currently, their greatest fighting force is Takeru. If Mistilteinn's magic is exhausted, their assault will be much harder.

It was the same for Ouka and Vlad, because she didn't make a contract with Vlad, the amount of magic provided was even lower than Mistilteinn's.

"Lapis! How much magic power have you left?!"

《"Currently it's still alright, I will reach the activity limit in ten minutes. Please refrain from changing the sword's shape as much as possible, it's a small amount, but it does consume magic."》

"Understood! Stay as zanbatou from now onwards!"

He prepared the zanbatou as he ran and trampled over the Dragoon's that kept surging.

Even when he got hit by bullets, he continued to run unconcerned.

Damn, there's too many of them!

He cursed and stopped his feet as not to commit a suicide, an army of Dragoons formed a barricade in the front.

To force his way through, he has to change the sword's shape to a huge zweihander and hit them all at once.

Reluctantly, Takeru tried to pull the trigger.

That's when.

A sniper support came from afar.

It was Usagi sniping, the majority of Dragoons fell down to the ground after being shot in the head.

"You saved me, Usagi."

《"You move too fast!"》

"Sorry, I don't have time to stop, I believe in your aim."

《"...uguu, that line, its unfair."》

"Ammo? How much do you have left?"

Takeru asked Usagi while running.

On the outer wall which had artillery installed on the rails, Usagi was checking the remaining bullets left in her gun case.

Two magazines were left. Now that she completed loading, there were only twenty shots left.

Ahead of Takeru as he moved, there were still around a hundred Dragoons.

Although the Inquisition's Dragoons in the rear were making good progress, it wasn't nearly enough to catch up to Takeru.

She was afraid of not having enough ammunition.

While readjusting her heart, she peeked through the scope and pulled the trigger after aiming towards a Dragoon that tracked Takeru.

Not a single shot can miss. Since she used a special anti-Dragoon rifle taking one down with a single shot was possible, however, for that she needed to head shot the Dragoon. The probably of a head shot was about 50%. She had confidence to do it at this distance, but the situation was the worst for Usagi who was weak to pressure.

The eye-patch on her left eye was worrying as well, her hands trembled.

Being unable to use one eye was a considerable disadvantage for a sniper. When an amateur looks through the scope, he closes his other eye instead, but professionals never close their eyes. Those who leave their eyes open and are able to adjust their reticles obtain immeasurable amount of information from the other eye.

In a situation like this, the field of view is narrowed and searching capability is reduced.

"............?"

Usagi feeling a presence behind her looked away from the scope.

When she looked behind, she suddenly saw a Dragoon on the rail used for the artillery that landed remotely five meters away from her.

——Fuck.

Normally she would have noticed it approaching. But because she was focused on helping Takeru and Ouka, she missed it.

《"I've got you, you shitty sniper! It sure must be fun to shoot people from a long distance!"》

Because many comrades of his were slain, blood rushed to the pilot's head, and he aimed his gun at Usagi.

What to do? What should I do?

Thoughts continued to rotate in Usagi's head again and again.

No matter how much she thought, she couldn't find a solution.

No time to circle around, no space, no speed.

In the first place, it's not time to think about something like that!

That's why she——

"Don't look down——on snipersssssssssssssss!!"

Usagi hugged her gun and started to run at the Dragoon.

Instead of circling around, she ran at straight line.

The Dragoon opened rapid fire with his assault rifle.

Fortunately the bullets passed by the side of her head by a small margin.

Usagi rushed in tears. It was nearly desperation. A suicide attack of a fool.

However, even though it was confusing, it wasn't a completely thoughtless action.

When Usagi approached the Dragoon like that, keeping the momentum she slid lowering her posture. It was the same movement she saw Takeru do earlier.

Usagi slid diving below Dragoon's crotch, and came out behind,

"There——!!"

And rose up not losing the flow, and made a quick turn. She held back the rifle that was nearly blown away by the force of her slide while raising her fighting spirit with a shout.

"——we go!!"

Fired up, she vigorously set up the rifle she was pressing to herself, aiming it forward.

The rifle's muzzle aimed from behind at the new model——

"Reaa——chh!!"

And immediately after——*_zudon_*

She stabbed the muzzle forcefully into its head and pulled the trigger.

With that, the Dragoon went completely silent.

Finally, the silence came.

"Haa... haa..."

Unable to bear it, she wanted to drop on her knees and start crying.

But, she calmed herself, and stiffened her legs.

Her comrades were fighting below. There was no time to slack off like that.

Usagi knew that she was the one who held back the platoon the most. She was always being a bother.

As not to be left behind, she had to do her best. Usagi raised her spirits and loaded bullets.

At the same time.

Suddenly, rumbling sounded under her feet.

"...what is this?"

She hurried to the opposite edge of the outer wall in a hurry, and looked around the entire facility.

The top floor of the tower emitted light.

《"Kusanagi! Please look at the top floor of the tower!!"》

Hearing the transmission from Usagi, Takeru withdrew his sword.

"Wha-t...?'

The entire facility was rumbling and shaking.

It wasn't an earthquake. Rather than that, it was something more powerful.

Just like Usagi told him to, Takeru looked at the top floor of the tower.

That moment——along with a dazzling light the tower burst open.

"——?!"

The blast hit Takeru on the others who were on the ground with slight delay.

"Suginami...!"

In the middle of the blast, Takeru called Ikaruga's name.

In addition to the top floor, the explosion destroyed about half of the tower as well. It happened instantaneously.

The experimental site was blown off without a trace, only debris remained.

And, Ikaruga was,

Ikaruga landed on middle of the barely standing tower while maintaining a firm defensive magic barrier.

She was embracing Isuka's body with both of her hands.

"...Isuka...!"

Ikaruga put Isuka down on the debris, and was gently stroking her cold cheek.

Isuka was barely breathing, her body was as hard as a stone, it started to crack and turn into sand.

"Just wait, I'll use the "Nanomachines" soo... guh——"*cough*"

She vomited blood.

Also, Ikaruga's body which was turned into elf's, was about to go back to original any moment.

The cells on her chest were cracking, turning to ashes and carried away by the wind.

The mutation, couldn't last even a minute longer.

The "Nanomachines" developed by Ikaruga weren't perfect. Even though she remade her body based on the cells of a captured species, the cells themselves were already dead. Even though Ikaruga forcibly assimilated and activated them, it was natural they wouldn't last for long.

Incomplete "Nanomachines" were made under assumption that they will be used for decomposition and reconstruction of inorganic materials, adapting it to living organisms was done in the last minute.

Also, because a margin of errors occur during the process of reconstructing the body, the burden on the flesh and internal organs is tremendous.

"...impossible, give up."

Isuka opened her eyes and declared that while losing her breath.

"...that "Nanomachines" are... incomplete."

"But if I input your genetic information...!"

"Then... your body will collapse."

It was just as Isuka said. Ikaruga's body would break down without the『Nanomachines』 at the moment.

If she tried to apply it to someone else, death awaited her.

Isuka didn't want that.

"...you can't... die yet."

"Why are you acting like a good guy now! You have no reason not to take advantage of me, but I do have a reason to be taken advantage of by you!"

"...wrong. That's not it... it's not you... that's... no good."

Isuka stretched her hand to Ikaruga.

Ikaruga noticed she reached for her ears, and moved her head right next to her mouth.

And,

"...Kanaria...is still...ali...ve."

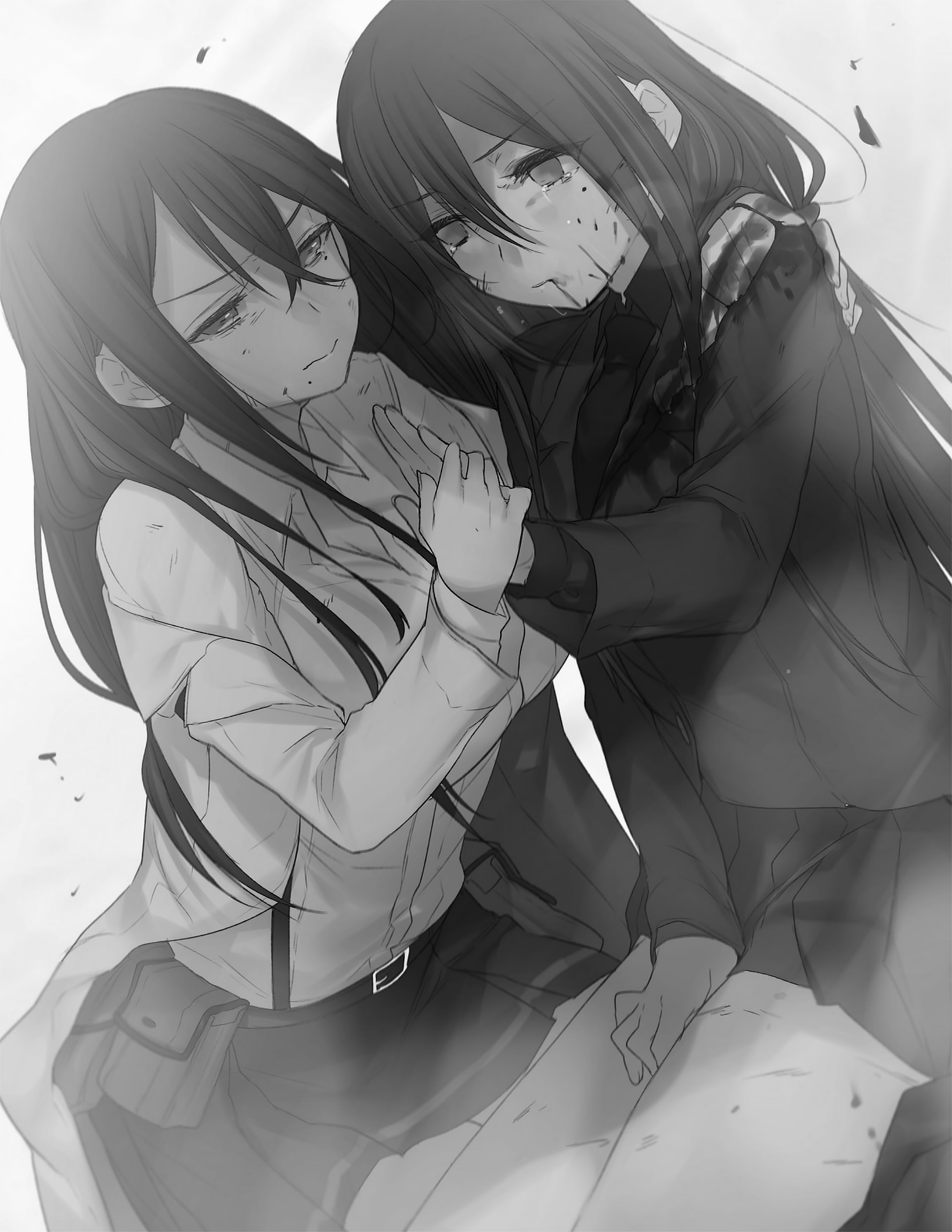
"?!"

"In............Valhalla."

She confessed that, and as if she was released from pain, her expression changed to a relaxed one.

"...aah...it no longer...hurts."

Ikaruga resolved herself, and held Isuka's hand.



"Finally............you came back...to me."

Isuka could no longer see, and her thoughts were unsteady. Ikaruga clasped her hands, passing her warmth onto her.

"Sorry...Isuka."

"All this time...I was...lonely..."

And, Ikaruga heard her last words.

"Ikaruga... I..."

"...yes..."

"Will...always...together...with......you............"

Isuka's hand Ikaruga was holding crumbled.

The body that was embraced, turned into shining sand and was carried away by wind.

And, the last thing remaining was a red lab coat... and a small picture book.

Ikaruga picked up the picture book, and quietly hugged it.

"...yeah, together. We will be always, just like we've been until now... together."

Ikaruga didn't shed any tears.

Not shedding any tears, and as if reaching Isuka who disappeared, she continued to put her feelings in the picture book.

"——Ohohoho, how fierce. It's the first time in 150 years that I see such large scale destruction."

A creepy man's voice sounded from above.

When she looked up with a hollow face, there was a black sphere floating in the air.

On the surface of the sphere that looked like a magic barrier, white magical circles were floating.

Ikaruga saw this barrier before.

It was what the enemy used during mock battle tournament.

"—......!"

The sphere slowly came down and settled in front of Ikaruga, then disappeared.

From within, came out a man who had an appearance of a priest.

The necromancer, Haunted.

"...even though you ate that explosion...!"

Ikaruga said surprised, and realized she was cornered.

Haunted, "nfufu", laughed creepily and tilted his head slightly.

"Certainly, you are part of 35th Test Platoon right?"

"...so what...!"

"Ooh——truly wonderful! I'm impressed! You're a role model for a mad scientist!"

He lightly clapped his hands.

"I also am a bit of an alchemist myself, but now I've seen it! It wouldn't be any weird to become part of written history by completing 『Nanomachines』 using science!"

"It's not scientific... I've borrowed the power of a Magical Heritage."

"Oh! Then even more so! Rather than a researcher, you did it as an alchemist! You could be called a result Alchemist created!"

Ikaruga frowned protesting against Haunted's declaration.

Alchemist's result. Ikaruga and Isuka, who were Suginami's were called like that ever since they were young.

Ikaruga hated being called like that from the bottom of her heart.

Suginami Ikaruga is not anyone's result. Her achievements are her own.

"...ahh, you're really wonderful. I like you. Oh, of course Mari-san is the first okay? I won't give up on Mari-san being my legal wife."

While being so embarrassed he didn't listen, he approached Ikaruga. She couldn't move because the burden on her body was too large.

Without "Nanomachines" Ikaruga had no combat capability and was just a researcher.

Resistance was meaningless. She could only leave it like that, and wait for her death.

"Ikaruga-san, won't you come with me?"

Haunted stretched his neck and proposed.

"In other words, won't you join Valhalla? With your talent, our strength would increase two, or threefold."

"…………"

"Isuka-san is... with all due respect, obsolete. I have already been taught the method of restoring elves and making Magical Dragoons, I absorbed a lot of other information as well."

"…………"

"How about it? It's not that bad of a proposal, is it?"

With a refreshing smile, Haunted tempted her to become his comrade.

Ikaruga shook her head in disgust, and glared at Haunted.

And,

"——Don't look down on me, you shitty bastard."

She pulled out a gun from her sleeve, and showered Haunted's face which was stretched in her direction. In response to shower of bullets hitting his face, Haunted leaned back as his body was losing its shape.

However, with a moist sound he reverted to upright posture soon after, and faced Ikaruga again with a smile, and a face full of holes.

"Aha, so it's no good after all. It's unfortunate, but it can't be helped."

A black swamp appeared under Haunted's feet.

And his body started to sink into the swamp.

"My wounds still haven't healed, and I was prohibited from fighting. That's why I have left a pilot in this place as a souvenir."

"…………?!"

"*This* is Isuka-san's achievement. If possible, please do enjoy it."

Leaving those words behind, Haunted's figure disappeared in the darkness.

However, the black swamp had yet to disappear.

The hole in the debris has began to spread.

Ikaruga felt something ominous, and then suddenly,

———GOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!

From the swamp, a beast's roar resounded.

Ikaruga rose up, and hurried backwards.

"...wh-at...?"

She felt an unusual presence inside the swamp.

A magical organism? Or maybe a Hero like the one that hit the school?

But, Ikaruga's speculations were all wrong.

In the next moment, huge claws flew out from inside of the swamp.

It was a foreleg that reminded one of a bird.

However, it wasn't organic. If anything, it was mechanical, like part of a Dragoon, covered with clear blue metal.

The two front legs emerged, and after hooking itself at the edge of the swamp, it's main body came out.

Ikaruga was horrified, at the sight of the body that crawled out.

That object accurately represented——

GEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!

——A mechanical Dragon.

Just like a mythological Dragon yet mechanical, a crafted and distorted figure.

Ikaruga intuitively understood.

That it was something similar to the Hero that hit the school.

The body of a Hero at that time was also made by using Dragoon technology. It was probably the same for this one. A specially made Dragoon, an imitation that had a Dragon's soul inside.

There was a magic that summoned Heroes from the past, referred to as 『Hero Summoning』, but there also other high level summoning magic.

Myths, summoning fantastical organisms that brought destruction upon humanity.

"Legend Summoning"

It was never used during the Witch Hunt War, a forbidden magic.

The embodiment of fairy tales was right in front of her.

After the force of the blast subsided, Takeru who was blown away, dragged his body out from under the rubble and communicated with his comrades through the intercom immediately.

"Usagi, Ootori! You alright?!"

"...I'm alright. It would've been dangerous if not for the body strengthening, but I'm not injured."

Ouka raised her body from the nearby rubble and replied directly.

《"N-no damage here either... just now, what was that."》

It seemed like Usagi was safe as well.

After ensuring their safety, Takeru looked up at the tower.

About a half of the tower disappeared.

Probably, probably she was blown away in previous explosion. It was the first time in his life witnessing such a large explosion.

"...Suginami...!"

With a chagrin, Takeru grind his teeth.

They didn't make it in time. They couldn't rescue her. He didn't know what happened, but Ikaruga should have been in that place. After that explosion... she no longer...

———GEEAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!

That's when, a distorted roar resounded from the tower.

"———?!"

《"Host, be cautious. I feel an ominous magic power... that's."》

Lapis stopped for a moment.

And,

《"———A Dragon."》

It was an unbelievable conclusion.

From the top of the tower, starting from the claws, a gigantic figure blew the debris away. It roared, but it was different from a beast's roar, it was an inorganic screech.

It had a huge, 30 meters long body, and was howling in the direction of the sky. Whether friend or foes, those who heard that roar lost even the will to run.

They were just stunned at the appearance of the Mechanical Dragon.

"?"

However, Takeru saw it.

When the debris was blown away as the Dragon came out.

Inside of it, he saw a white cloth mixed in, he couldn't miss it.

"——Lapis! Concentrate strengthening on the legs! I'll leap there!"

《"Understood."》

Takeru lowered his waist and put all his strength in his legs, it wasn't the time to worry about the consumption of magic.

Takeru put everything in, and jumped towards the debris that was falling from the tower.

As the Dragon rushed out, Ikaruga's body was thrown into the air.

While she was falling down pulled by gravity, she reflected on herself.

She wasn't being harsh on herself, but the fact that she was a huge sinner was undeniable.

If she was asked whether she ever felt guilty, she would respond NO.

She didn't forget about the life she led to just achieve her objectives. That she toyed with life, she didn't think of that life as bad.

She lived her life without regret after leaving Kanaria and Isuka behind.

That's why she moved in order to prevent the experiment on the restoration of the elves.

Ikaruga leaked the location of the Lost Matrix by herself and entered the experimental site by pretending to sell it to Alchemist.

There were some irregulars, but from there, this was the result.

Even though the Lost Matrix was gotten rid off before, the experiment would have succeeded if the technology progressed further. So she wanted to at least slow the development of the technology by destroying the laboratory.

That's the reason she developed the "Nanomachines", it was to destroy it by using antimatter.

But, she lost too much...

...everything... until the end I did as I pleased.

When Takeru decided to change himself to become a better person, she couldn't forgive it, that's what she secretly thought.

Although she finally found a good place with much effort, she was left behind. She still remembers when she was in such mood.

So it was as not to be left behind by Takeru. In the end, it was behavior born from that selfish thought.

If this was to happen I should have done it with him after all... I wonder if its divine punishment.

With a thought that was unlike a researchers, Ikaruga involuntarily made a bitter smile.

Really, it was a fitting end for her.

Ikaruga closed her eyes, and quietly waited for the end to come.

——**swshh**

That moment, suddenly, she gently rose up against the force of gravity.

On her legs and her back, she felt a faint reaction.

When she opened her eyes, she saw strong arms wrapped around her body.

She raised her face and looked at the person who held her.

"——Geez, don't worry me so much you dumbass."

It was Takeru.

He looked at her with a genuinely relieved face.

"...Kusa...nagi?"

"I thought it was already over when I saw that explosion, I'm happy that you're safe."

Ikaruga who was looking at Takeru dumbfounded turned to look below.

This idiot, he jumped up when he saw her falling down.

Ikaruga sighed and smiled bitterly, leaving everything to him.

She pressed her head against his chest and laughed.

"Chasing after me into a place like this... just how soft are you."

"It's not just me. The platoon, all its members are here."

"So, the softy platoon, the platoon that doesn't mind its business."

Ikaruga spoke ironically at a time like this, causing Takeru to look down at her dissatisfied.

"You're the one at fault for trying to shoulder everything by yourself. Doing things that don't suit you... you didn't want to involve your comrades right?"

"That's right. I told you, I wanted to resolve everything by myself."

She faced the other way and crossed her arms.

"Well... that's why I failed."

Deep inside her eyes there was sadness, Takeru made a deep sigh and said.

"It's fine to cry out..."

"...I don't want to be told that you will carry half like you said to others."

"I won't say that. If you say that you don't like it then I won't say it."

"Hmmm. Then I wonder what will you tell me now, Kusanagi."

Ikaruga asked with a serious face.

Takeru exhaled through his nose, and slowly landed on the ground while using magic power for propulsion.

"Rather than carry it alone, carrying it together the two of us——"

He slowly put down Ikaruga on the ground, and told her up close.

"——That way, it'll be more interesting, right?"

They were very silly and selfish words.

Ikaruga stared at Takeru's face for a moment, amazed, and her expression turned affectionate.

"You're the worst."

"I'm aware of it. But it's half true."

"But, well done for someone uninvited."

She praised Takeru which was unusual and staggering she sat down on the rubble.

Just a bit, she was able to go back to her original self.

It wasn't the time to be immersed in sorrow.

Such a Suginami Ikaruga was unneeded right now. Saying that to herself, Ikaruga looked up.

The Mechanical Dragon dug its fingers into the edge of the tower, and vigorously jumped into the air.

It extended the mechanical wings, used a huge magical booster like the one Takeru had in his witch hunter form, and began flying over the facility like a fighter jet.

"Lapis, are you done with the analysis?"

《"The exterior is covered with high density blue crystal. It would be difficult to inflict a wound with ordinary magic and physical attacks. I don't know the name, but from the shape and the amount of magic, it's probably a wyvern class. Although its classified as an inferior dragon species, it is a dragon nevertheless."》

"…………"

《"Estimated chance of Host winning alone is 0.4%."》

0.4%. Such a low number made him feel dizzy.

Dragons are called the worst fantastical organism, unlike elves its strength came simply from their life force, their performance as organisms was non-standard. They have a large amount of magical power, but most species don't use magic. Or rather don't have enough intelligence to do it.

One of the things that should be noted, is 『Dragon Breath』. Dragon magic attribute is spate out from its mouth unconverted and destroys anything on its path.

There was many of those who were called Dragon Slayers in the past, they've been said to be horsemen that have subdued a monster alone, there were many of those heroes.

Even one of Kusanagi family's ancestors was said to have slaughtered a wicked dragon... but he wasn't sure whether it was true or not.

Just as Takeru thought of how to deal with it, Ikaruga took a deep breath.

"...that Relic Eater is really useless."

"?! H-hey, d-don't annoy her. M-my upper and lower body is——"

"Certainly, it would be different if it had a proper body but... that, is a machine right? And its so big too. Standing up aside, it's unnatural for it to fly in the first place."

Ikaruga was playing with her hair, and after leering at Takeru, she looked at the Dragon flying in the sky.

"The armor made of blue crystal too, is softer when compared to the scales of a dragon. It might be impossible for your Relic Eater that hasn't much magic, but it should be possible for modern weapons."

"…………?"

"Hmm, probably the magic power is generated from a special Magical Heritage that's installed. There is something that looks like a core, right. It's not realistic to pierce the core through its thick armor. But if the armor were to be thinned, logically speaking, the mechanism would be also exposed. That is its weakness."

As if saying 'defeat it', Ikaruga made a wide smile.

Takeru looked at her puzzled, and Ikaruga,

"——Let's beat that Dragon."

She said as if it was perfectly natural.

Sougetsu had almost conquered the entire enemy facility and was looking up at the sky with a cigar in his hand while standing atop of a wrecked Dragoon.

"Oh, a dragon. They pulled out something nostalgic again."

It seemed like he was saying "not bad" as he blew out the smoke.

Around him, there was a large amount of Dragoon wreckage scattered around. Almost all of it was disposed by him alone.

"Awesome, that's the first time I see such a thing."

The boy Dullahan who was sitting on the Dragoon wreckage as well raised a voice of admiration in Sougetsu's direction.

"Same technology as the one used for the Hero Summoning... Legend Summoning should be impossible unless you destroy a country. If possible, I hope I can get a sample."

"As expected this is pretty bad, isn't it, the Twilight Type produces a small amount of magic, right? With an opponent like that, won't its magic power deplete fast?"

"Because of a limiter magic power that isn't converted into spells cannot be absorbed. It's affinity with the dragon attribute is the worst."

Sougetsu grumbled, and the boy looked at him with an excited face.

"Can I get an order to sortie? It's been a while since I was allowed to turn into a witch hunter."

"You can't. We will only intervene if Kusanagi-kun loses. Otherwise there will be no point in putting him in front."

"But..." he added that, and pressed a cigar into the Dragoon.

"Certainly it will turn out bad at this rate. If he is defeated in a proper fight I'll have to give up, but I won't agree with something like being defeated because he ran out of magic."

What to do, Sougetsu thought with a hand on his jaw.

There,

"——You seem troubled, shall I lend a hand?"

On top of another wreckage, there was one more shadow.

Sougetsu faced towards the source of the voice, and after being astonished for a moment, he grinned.

The giant was flying around freely in the sky, a dragon which is the strongest of all fantastical organisms, flapping its mechanical wings it easily caught up with flying Dragoon's movements.

《"Uwaa, don't come! Don't come don't come——"》

Along with a bitter scream, the Mechanical Dragon chewed the Dragoon in its mighty jaws.

《"Shit——wasn't this guy an ally?!"》

Another Dragoon let out a voice as it fled towards the outer wall to escape from the facility.

But the king of land and sky didn't miss it.

From its opened mouth, it spewed a muddy, navy blue stream.

《"Stoop——uwaaa!"》

A beam-like dragon breath swallowed the Dragoon.

The machine that was swallowed by magic power disappeared not even leaving dust behind.

《"As if I'd fight with such a thing! Screw the money! Run away!"》

《"This is the Spriggan Dragoon unit! We request support as soon as possible!"》

《"N-no good... there's no way we can win."》

《"Requesting support——hey, you bastards don't run away! Desertion in front of the enemy is a firing squad sentence!"》

The mercenaries who were on the ground, and Inquisition as well, seeing the devastation going on in the sky they scattered and fled.

Dragon aimed at the ground, and twin spears made of crystal shined.

It showed a beautiful turn in mid-air, and dived towards the ground.

Heading towards the wimps on the ground, the Dragon landed on the ground on its huge hind legs and roared.

And like that, it trod over countless Dragoons with ease.

Next it headed towards the humanoid forms that scattered like small spiders, and once again it opened its jaws.

Dragon Breath.

Swallowed by navy blue wave of destruction, everything was dissolved, buildings included.

——GOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA...

As if ridiculing the swallowed life, the King roared.

But at that moment.

Five stakes struck Dragon's open mouth

After being entering the mouth, the stakes shattered without inflicting a wound on it. The Dragon turned its awareness at the opponent that attacked it from surprise.

There, was a girl with sunset coloured hair moving straight towards the Dragon, Ouka.

"——Kusanagi!"

Ouka was approaching the Dragon at high speed, and shouted into the intercom.

Immediately after, the Dragon felt a presence behind him and vigorously swiped with its tail.

Buildings were broken and scattered like sand, turning into debris.

"OoooOOO!'

A voice came from the sky.

The moment the Dragon moved his neck towards it, a blade struck the crystal eye.

kiiin!

The blade was repelled by the crystal.

The Dragon tried to capture the azure knight that aimed for its eyes with one of its forelegs.

But the azure knight avoided it by a hairsbreadth.

Takeru, almost grazed by the dragon's foreleg landed on the ground.

"Don't stop! Keep moving!"

"Got it!"

Ouka and Takeru moved freely around the Dragon. Moving from the ground, and leaping using buildings for their footing, and continuing to move without stopping.

The Dragon pursued the two, and they dodged by a small margin.

Takeru continued to avoid in a nick of time.

——*This better be enough, Suginami!*

He prayed in his head that Ikaruga's strategy would work.

The strategy Ikaruga proposed.

In it, Takeru and Ouka's role was to buy time, that's all.

Usagi who was sniping from the fifth laboratory's outer wall, was currently running along the rail made for the artillery, heading north.

In order to increase her speed, she left her heavy gun. Currently she was empty handed.

《"Usagi, you there yet?"》

"Don't talk nonsense! How wide do you think this is?!'

While breathing deeply, Usagi continued to run with all she had.

Usagi wasn't the smartest, but she had good reflexes. Apparently her absurd strength allowed her to run fast as well.

"Is it... really there...?! I can't see it at all!"

《"It should be. When I came here, I saw it from the car."》

"The 'should be' part is troubling!"

With a tearful look, she caught her breath.

Her legs hurt. Her arms hurt. Her lungs hurt. Because the hook of her bra came off, her breasts shook and started to hurt.

Usagi's breasts shook as she headed north. Just when she wanted to complain about being at her limit.

She found a massive object attached to the outer wall.

"...is this... it?"

It was a huge battery. It was much larger than howitzers installed on the rails, and it looked more futuristic.

This was an anti-ballistic rail cannon developed by Alchemist. It was a a frightening weapon that fired bullets at speed ten times greater than speed of sound.

《"Can you see a cockpit or something like that? Sit there, just pull the trigger after aligning it with your reticle. Then snipe."》

"...uuu...there's so many switches, I don't understand."

《"You don't need to touch them. You will destroy the portion on its spine where the engine for floating is located. That should be the place where the anti-magic material would be thin."》

"............uuu."

《"If you can destroy it, it'll be our win. He won't be able to move, crushed by his own weight."》

Usagi peeked through the scope as she was told, and grasped the control stick.

Just by tilting it, the gun barrel moved precisely.

Indeed, it wasn't much different from sniper rifles.

《"The firing rate goes up to five. After that it needs a few seconds to cool down."》

The ammo limit increased Usagi's tension.

She hated her complex. Unlike Takeru, Ikaruga and Ouka, her complex affected her specially.

It was like that with everything. Studying, exercise, anything, it were all ruined because of her fright.

But she would never allow her comrades to lose their lives because of this complex. That's why Usagi put a finger on the trigger.

If she misses it'll be over. But if she doesn't shoot, it will end before it even started.

That's the sniper.

That's why——Usagi fired.

"——Ghh!"

After she squeezed the trigger to its limit, an artillery shell was fired with a tremendous sound of a bombardment.

The first round——didn't hit.

"...missed...?!"

Because of the terrifying impact, Usagi moved her face away from the scope in shock.

《"Load the second shell fast! It's over if it notices your position!"》

Usagi pulled the bolt in a hurry. The gun reacted and the shell was loaded automatically.

Her trembling increased.

Because of excessive breathing, her vision shook.

The second round——didn't hit.

The third round——didn't hit.

"Aaa...aa...uuu..."

《"It's all right. Calm down, you can do it."》

Even Ikaruga's words no longer reached Usagi. She was in the worst state.

Her body wasn't in perfect condition because one of her eyes wasn't working. She using a weapon she didn't know before, a rail cannon. It was a situation where she couldn't miss.

The worst. It was the worst condition.

Because she used only one eye her field of vision was blurred. Her aim was blurred as well because of that.

And above all, Usagi's heart shook.

The fourth round——didn't hit.

Tears gathered in her eye, and something blocked her throat.

Yeah, I am a bad girl after all. Someone help me. Help me grandfather.

The face of her grandfather who taught her how to snipe appeared in her head.

But, that's when she saw Takeru's figure through the scope.

He danced continuing to avoid the attacks, he avoided the incoming kick from the Dragon's hind legs, and the Dragon's tail approached him.

Seeing an attack that was about grind Takeru into the ground, Usagi completely stopped breathing.

"————"

She opened her eye wide, and completely stopped thinking.

Leaving out unnecessary thoughts, in front of her comrade being in danger, at the very last moment she aimed and shot at the machine.

"——Phew!"

While exhaling air, she squeezed the trigger.

Although Takeru responded to the tail swipe approaching, he was still stuck in the air after avoiding the claw attack.

"No good——"

I'm done for!

Just when he thought that,

Together with a tremendous impact, the Dragon's huge body shook vigorously.

The tail's momentum stopped, and the huge figure staggered.

"——You did it... Usagi, you did it!"

After confirming their victory, Takeru smiled.

...**zunn**!

However, the Dragon stood firmly on its legs, withstanding Usagi's snipe.

The victory they were so confident of, has spilled out of their hands.

《"...it seems like a single hit isn't enough... the float engine wasn't destroyed."》

With a voice full of regret, Ikaruga said into the intercom.

Horrified, Takeru grind his teeth.

The Dragon opened its mouth while staggering.

A big one was coming.

"......!"

In front of the Dragon's mouth, was Ouka.

Takeru lowered his waist without hesitation.

"——Kusarigama!"

At the same time as he jumped, the sword changed shape into a kusarigama.

He wielded the chain to hook up to the Dragon's neck,

Continuing with that momentum, Takeru clung to the Dragon's spine.

And the sword's shape returned to zanbatou.

"Shit! This...!"

Single-mindedly he stabbed the sword into the spine.

A high-pitched metallic sound came, but the spine wasn't damaged by that even in the location that was previously hit by rail cannon. To damage the internal mechanism, another hit was needed.

Even so, Takeru continued to attack again and again not giving up.

Suddenly, he felt the power was leaving him, the armor that covered his body started to break down.

He was going back to his original flesh and blood.

《"Magic has been exhausted. It's the activity limit."》

When told these words, Takeru felt despair.

———I.

———I can't protect her?

———My comrade, one who is precious to me.

———Will I lose it again?

His thought went blank. In the world that seemed like it stopped because of Soumatou, he burned Ouka's figure into his eyes.

Ouka shook her head slowly towards him.

At the same time as in Dragon's mouth magic gathered for dragon breath. Yeah. It's the end.

Even though he promised to carry it, his atonement will end like this.

Takeru tried to scream Ouka's name.

《"——You guys! Don't forget about me!"》

The one that cut in, was Mari's voice.

Takeru looked in the direction of where the voice came from, he sharpened his vision, and far on the outer wall.

There, was Mari who expanded a magical circle to the very limit.

《"Takeru! Receive it——my magic!"》

Seeing Mari's face that was full of confidence, he remembered.

When they defeated Haunted during the tournament, and that cooperation.

"Lapis! Intrinsic magic!"

《"Understood——Twilight Enchantment activated."》

An azure magical circle appeared instantly, and the blade shone with azure.

《"Passing it to you——"Aurora Cannon"!"》

Mari's magic gathered into a giant rock, and rushed at Takeru at furious speed.

Takeru received that enormous amount of magic power with Lapis' blade.

Gyuuuuu...!

The magical shell was sucked into Lapis' blade in no time, and its shine transferred into the blade.

As the magic power was filled, Takeru's body turned into witch hunter form again.

"Unicorn's Destructive Lance!"

Along with the technique, his entire body shot straight onto the Dragon.

The blade pierced the damaged portion and slid in cutting the internal mechanism.

But it didn't end at that.

It didn't end.

After piercing with the sword, he changed it into a huge zweihander.

The internal mechanism was broken down further causing the Dragon to stagger.

Not yet, it's still not enough.

"Lapis! Use everything, don't leave a single drop!"

《"Understood. Flexible material——full burst."》

A huge amount of magic power swept down from the sword and detonated inside of the Dragon dyeing it with destruction.

Because it was Mari's magic which was said to be the ultimate destruction, it even damaged the Dragon's thick armor.

Even so, the Dragon still stood, and was going to deliver the final blow to Ouka.

Tenacious, they were called the strongest fantastical species.

However,

Dragon slaying...! Ain't that cool! Honestly, it makes my blood boil!

Takeru was a genius at using the heretical swordsmanship style.

It was an opponent worthy of Kusanagi, the ultimate monster. The strategy no longer mattered.

All that was left was an onslaught.

Therefore——he will enjoy the hunt!

Takeru entered the world of swordplay, he grabbed the sword with both of his hands.

He put all his weight, all his strength into the sword.

In the first place, Kusanagi-style wasn't anti-personnel. It was a swordsmanship style made to counter huge fantastical organisms.

Among the techniques, there was one with limited usage.

And that is——

"Kusanagi Double-Edged style———Rain Dragon's Charge!"

With the sword still piercing, he rushed down the back of the Dragon.

A skill used at the root of its neck, usable only on dragons that allowed him to remain on it and not be shaken off. The dragon's short forelegs couldn't reach him, and in this position the tail couldn't reach him as well as he gouged his sword in deeper.

With a large sword cut into it like a shark biting into its prey, he tore it down bit by bit.

And he ran on its back leaving the sword to the momentum.

No one could stop this dash.

Kusanagi-style's magic-severing sword. It stood against magic since ancient times.

Therefore, it was superior.

Even if it went up against the strongest fantastical organism, all of them shall be cut.

"Let's goooOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!!"

Takeru drew an arc like a moon, and kept swinging the huge blade dripping with magic on the spine.

Without killing the momentum, Takeru's body slammed into the ground.

He gasped in pain and rose up to confirm it was done for.

The Dragon, even though the internal devices and pieces of the crystal were scattering in the air, it still stood there.

"...fall down..."

Takeru murmured as if praying.

"Fall down...fall down...fall down...! Fall down already...!"

His prayer echoed.

At the same time, the Dragon staggered and looked up at the sky.

——Goo....guoo.......

It roared and aiming for the sky, it fired a dragon's breath.

The distorted navy blue magic penetrated the cloudy sky and became a pillar of light.

Clouds scattered because of the shock wave, and the light of stars appeared from behind them.

And,

The Dragon ran out of magic in its body and staggered while facing up.

——**Zusunnn**

His prayer reached it.

The Dragon lost its floating device and couldn't support his body's weight on his own, as a result it fell on its back.

It didn't have any strength left, it was completely immobilized.

It already turned into a corpse.

"Subjugation——complete."

While dust rose up into the air, in front of the Dragon's corpse there was a single knight.

Takeru swung his sword to the side and exhaled.

And like that, he nearly fell forward.

He looked up as his vision grown hazy.

From a distance, he saw a woman in lab coat running towards him.

Takeru will never forget the expression she had on her face at that time.

There was no way he would forget that worried look on Ikaruga's face.

Epilogue

"Fufufufun! How was it! I appeared like a hero when you were in a pinch!"

"…………"

"If I didn't ask Chairman to release my collar, I wonder what would've happened to you～?"

"…………— "

"Ohho～ what's up with that attitude. Why are you looking with such a lukewarm expression at the benefactor who saved your life～?"

After the battle ended, Ouka was receiving treatment in a Seelie vehicle, and Mari blatantly demanded thanks from her.

Ouka's expression said that she won't acknowledge it, and a feeling of being genuinely annoyed swirled in her heart.

Mari puffed up more and more seeing it.

"That's because you're useless! Speaking of which, who went to the Chairman's car?'

"…guhh."

"How is it? Being saved by magic which you hate so much?"

"…ghhhhhhh."

As Ouka made a dissatisfied expression, Mari puffed up her chest looking completely full of herself.

"Now, you can finally understand the greatness of this Mari-sama right? Shall we end the feud between us now? However, you need to call me Mari-sama from now——"

"Shut up you fuel tank!"

"——F-fueh… what did you say?!"

"Aren't you a fuel tank! You just delivered some magic power to Kusanagi! Why are you acting so bossy, you damn red plastic tank!"

"M-m-my magic power isn't kerosene!"

"Being a gasoline stand is perfect for you!"

"It's not gasoline either——!"

Ouka could no longer bear without fighting back, and it turned into a quarrel after all.

The Seelies who were providing the treatment, genuinely wanted to interfere.

"...those guys, they can't get along even at a time like this."

After he finished reporting to Chairman, Takeru came back and smiled wryly seeing them act like usual.

"Oh? Speaking of which, where did Usagi go?"

He tried looking around, but he couldn't find her figure.

Maybe she was receiving treatment somewhere, or she was helping out the Seelies.

Just when he was about to move his legs to look for Usagi, he found another one of his comrades.

"Suginami."

He moved towards Ikaruga who was sitting on top of the rubble and looked at Ouka and Mari.

Ikaruga who was spacing out, saw Takeru's face.

"Didn't you receive treatment?"

"...I can treat my body myself."

"...I see."

Takeru went behind Ikaruga and sat with his back against hers.

"You're not joining them?"

"I don't feel like it. This sight calms me down."

It felt like she was still spacing out.

As if the place she belongs to was far away, and she stared in the distance towards it.

In her hand, she was carefully holding a small beat-up picture book. On the cover of the picture book, there was was a parent and a child holding hands.

Ikaruga lightly stroked that picture.

"...I have acquired a goal that will allow me to fight as well."

Hearing her murmur that, Takeru placed his fingers on her head.

"If you have a goal... say it properly next. We're not completely useless after all."

"..........."

As he stroked her head, Ikaruga revealed a surprised face. She looked behind herself, and stared at Takeru.

Next, she moved her face close enough to actually kiss him.

"Woaah, w-www-what's is it?"

"What's this? Hey, what's this?"

"What do you mean by... what?"

"Why did you pat my head I wonder?"

"Ah... this is, it's with a meaning of 'well done'."

"Out there, there's a lot of women who hate their heads being patted you know?"

"Aa...I-I see. I guess. Sorry, that was insensitive."

"It was so clumsy I'll sue you for sexual harassment."

"...sorry."

He retracted his hand in a hurry and looked at Ikaruga apologetically.

Ikaruga looked at Ouka and Mari disappointed for a moment, and then,

"...fine then, pat me more."

With her back turned to Takeru, she said such a thing.

"...eeh?"

"Come to think of it I've never had my head patted before, so pat me more."

"...yes."

He didn't really understand and didn't retort afraid of blundering, so he started to stroke her head again.

He twisted his body in a weird way and patted her head from behind.

What's... this.

It was surreal sight, Takeru stared at her.

He kept doing that for a while, he stroked Ikaruga's head.

Since there was no reaction coming from her, he glanced at her from the side.

"..........."

Ikaruga still looked spaced out, staring at Ouka and Mari.

But a single droplet drew a line on her cheek.

Surprised, Takeru's expression stiffened, and he immediately released the hand he was patting her with and returned to his original posture.

Ikaruga said she failed.

Takeru didn't know what happened to Ikaruga.

What she has lost, or how much did it meant for her.

Even so, he of course chose to be on his own again.

Ikaruga rested her back on his and said.

"...the talk about carrying burdens, I know that you hate it."

"............"

"But if you at least lean on me sometimes, I think that would be alright."

"............"

"I might not be able to shoulder your sins."

Ikaruga remained silent.

Despite that, Takeru continued.

"So at least let me shoulder your tears."

Immediately after he made his resolution,

**sssh*... he felt something warm on his back.

"...I'm not crying, idiot."

Ikaruga entrusted her back to him.

Under the morning sky's glow, the two of them continued to stay silent.

It wasn't heavy, but it wasn't light either.

Even though it wasn't half, or even a third, Ikaruga certainly entrusted her weight to Takeru.

With a bitter smile, Takeru looked up at the morning glow.

"So stubborn."

The weight he felt on his back, just this time, felt strangely good.

AntiMagic Academy, Seelie hospital.

In this place, which provided the cutting edge medical care, there were many patients receiving treatment after being injured with magic.

There was a hospice gathering of critically ill patients, almost all patients there were people with no chance for recovery.

"…………"

In the intensive care unit lighted by warm daylight, Kirigaya Kyouya has come to visit Yoshimizu Akira's close while sitting on a wheelchair.

Kyouya looked frustrated as she continued to sleep

Every day, it was his daily route to spend time here until sunset. The possibility of Yoshimizu's survival was only about twenty percent.

It was a body replica subjected to rapid growth, her life was short. Her resistance that was part of human nature was also below half of the original.

Akira remained asleep on the bed of ICU that was separated by a glass window. There were a lot of tubes inside, and her bluish face didn't budge. The only way to confirm she was alive, is the fact that the respirator's mask was clouded with white.

Even if she survived, it would be impossible for her to live a normal life.

She was a clone. The original Yoshimizu Akira was already dead.

Her family wouldn't accept a duplicate, Inquisition didn't publicly acknowledge her existence either. If her family refuses to accept her, she will have to spend her entire life hidden in this hospital. She will have no choice but to live all alone with a weakened body.

No matter what, she couldn't attain happiness.

Guilt and hatred for the necromancer, was unbearably frustrating for Kyouya.

"I… couldn't save… even a single comrade…!"

He clenched his fists in anger, and although he wanted to stomp with his feet, there were no feet to use for that.

Taking revenge aside, he couldn't even walk.

The regret raged in him.

He wondered if he will stay like this forever, living with this hatred inside of him. Was there a meaning to such a life?

Anger disappears from his pupils, and he sunk into despair again.

That's when.

**gyuu*, the intensive care unit's door opened.

He looked towards it disappointed, and there was,

"Heey, Kirigaya-kun. Visiting today as well? How admirable."

AntiMagic Academy's Chairman, Ootori Sougetsu. He held flowers in his hand.

Kyouya didn't answer, and returned his gaze towards Akira again.

"I can understand your sorrow. I too once lost all my comrades at once. It's no wonder you sank into despair."

"…………"

"But in that condition, it's like Yoshimizu-kun was already dead, she won't get up."

While putting the flowers in the treatment room, Sougetsu spoke words of comfort to Kyouya.

Kyouya didn't react to them.

Sougetsu smiled bitterly, stood behind Kyouya and put a hand on his shoulder.

"You see, revenge… doesn't produce anything. Living on just hatred is sad. You need to walk facing forward."

Reacting to Sougetsu's words, Kyouya's body slightly trembled.

"…ha…I can't walk, I have no legs."

He gripped the hem of his clothes and lamented his lack of feet.

Kyouya lost both of his legs in that fight. A modern prosthesis could be made, but he will never enjoy the feel of the ground again.

His anger overflowed.

"I don't believe that revenge doesn't produce anything… for the sake of my dead comrades, for Yoshimizu's sake, I won't say such a nice thing…! I, with all my sadness and hatred I want to beat the shit out of that son of a bitch! I want him to taste the same feeling! That's all!"

"…………"

"Other than that——there's nothing else I want!"

With tears in his eyes, he embraced the rage.

Sougetsu stared at him as he was like that,

——While smiling like a Cheshire cat.

"Hey, Kirigaya-kun. If you want your revenge that much, why don't I lend you a hand."

He brought his lips close to Kyouya's ear, and whispered with voice like a bell.

"Don't you want power?"

"…………"

"For the sake of revenge, a tremendous strength."

Kyouya stared at Akira, and opened his eyes wide. The color of his pupils was stained red by all of his negative emotions.

Afterwords

It's been a while, I'm Yanagimi Touki.

Now then, the third volume was a story about alchemists.

Ikaruga was the main, it's big tits turn. After last time's tiny breasts, the breast size sky-rocketed.

———This work, Antimagic Academy, will continue to present you various kinds of breasts.

Don't explode at me with 'you're not the one to talk about the big ones in the series', from girls with huge breasts to a boobless fuel tank, I wrote it with my unchanging love for all kinds of breasts.

In the end 'He' came out, just how the heck does he pick the timing.

And as scheduled, next time its big-breasted loli's turn.

Well it is scheduled, but it might always change, but for the time being it's big-breasted loli's turn next.

It's a big-breasted loli. Everyone loves big-breasted lolis. Even if not everyone loves big-breasted lolis, I really love big-breasted lolis.

Let me say it once more, I love big breasted lolis——eh, you were supposed to talk about the hard content, but you ended up talking about breasts... is it?

Boobs are good too, but there's an important announcement to make!

In February of last year, a comic version of this works has started at Dragon Age-sama. It's my first time to have a comic version of book, so I'm quite excited.

For the people whom I mentioned already, and those who i didn't, thank you very much for supporting this series!

Now at the end are the credits. First I would like to apologize to the S&Y-sama who is in charge of me and pushed my back and to whom I ended up causing a huge inconvenience. Kippu-sensei who draws wonderful illustrations which surpass my imagination every time. Hanao Sutarou-sensei who draws a wonderful, cute and erotic action comic.

And to all the readers who have picked up this book, thanks.

Then, I pray to see you next time.

Yanagimi Touki

！？
マリが可愛いくてしかたないけど、
やっぱりラピスが気になるお年頃です。